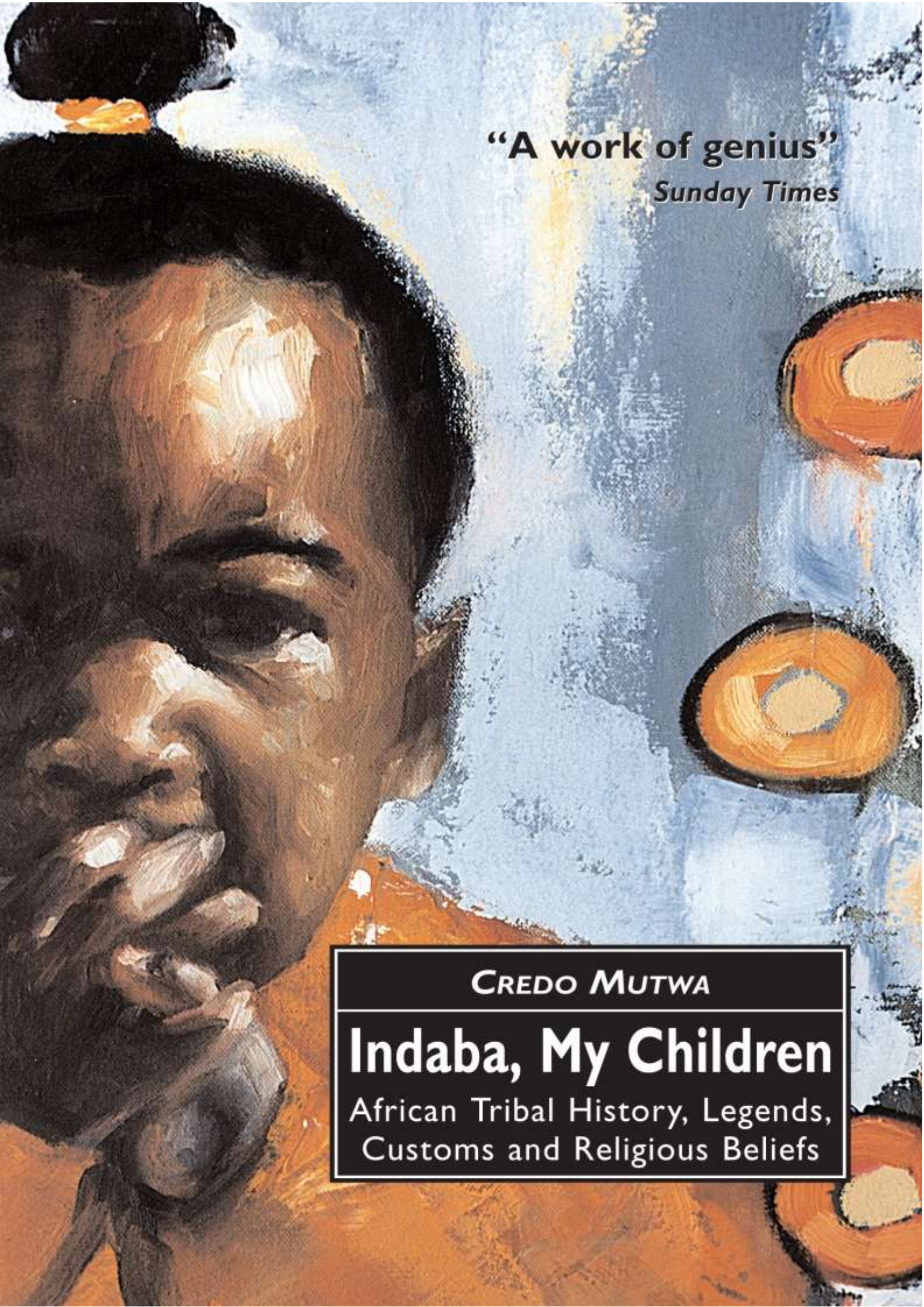




“A work of genius”
Sunday Times

CREDO MUTWA

Indaba, My Children

African Tribal History, Legends,
Customs and Religious Beliefs

VISIT...

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

Book Two

Stand Forever, Oh Zima-Mbje

(Compiled from numerous
old Mashona, Venda,
Bechuana and Varozwi
songs and stories)

This is the story of the Lost Phoenician empire in Southern Africa, a story which is still sung and told around village fires in South and Central Africa today, a true story – it has thousands of relics in the hands of witchdoctors to support it.

Badly rusted and crumbling swords of ancient Greek manufacture, old gold coins and parts of bronze shields and helmets, bronze spears and Egyptian battle axes, all of which are in the secret possession of witchdoctors throughout Southern Africa, confirm the truth of the story of Zima-Mbje.

THE COMING OF THE STRANGE ONES

Lumbedu, the witchdoctor, had not slept well at all the previous night; in fact, for him the night had been one long hideous, screaming nightmare in which he had been alternately chased, strangled, mauled and torn apart by no fewer

than ten different kinds of monsters, from giant crocodiles to bright red monkeys with ten eyes apiece.

The cause of all these unpleasant nocturnal visitations from the Demon World was not far to seek at all: it was nothing more than the fact that the rather overweight Lumbedu had stuffed his capacious belly well-nigh to bursting during the feast held in his honour on the previous day. This feast had been held by one of his patients he had cured of a bad fever by forcing down claypots-full, one after the other, of a strong purgative into the luckless man's stomach, with the result that although the poor fellow had been quickly cured of his fever, his stomach and

intestines had been almost purged out of existence.

During the feast *Lumbedu* had brought forth loud shouts of amazement and admiration from the rest of the guests by excelling himself in his elephantine appetite. He had eaten the large half of a goat – haunch, ribs, shoulder, neck and head – pushing the smaller portion across to a starveling who had been staring at him with bright astonished eyes and a wet, drooling mouth. Then he had attacked a great bowl of boiled ox intestines and a pile of hot corn cakes, flavoured with kaffirbeer, with the ferocity of an invading conquerer. He had concluded this most royal repast with an almighty draught of two full claypots of bubbling

cornbeer.

The midsummer sun was going down and the distant forests were now veiled by a smoky, mistlike haze, which made them look farther away than they really were. Wisps of smoke rose into the windless pale blue sky from great kraals and villages, while loud in the ears were the lowing of cows and the hollow bellowing of bulls as large herds of cattle were driven homewards from the forest-fringed pastures.

The rays of the slowly departing God of Light shone on the sweat-drenched face of the panting boy who was running through the forest as if Watamaraka, the Queen of Evil herself, was after his blood. He was a very frightened boy

indeed – anyone could tell from his eyes. What had he seen?

Follow the boy, my children – dark-brown, thin, naked, swift as a wild eagle of the hills. Follow the boy to whom the breath of fear has given the strength of a thousand men and the endurance of a wild buffalo. His toes and feet are bleeding – his left thigh is red with blood where a cruel thorn from a *meva* bush is deeply buried in his flesh. But he runs on heedless of pain and tiredness.

What has he seen? Guess, my children, guess!

Lo, he bursts through the forest and before him rears the stockade of a big kraal, a kraal consisting of sixteen huts surrounded by a stockade of pointed poles

interwoven with thorny creepers. It is the kraal of his father, Lumbedu the witchdoctor, and the boy runs into the kraal as if he were the Seventh Wind itself.

‘Father, father,’ he cries shrilly.

Ojoyo, his mother, sees him and comes waddling fatly to investigate the reason for her son’s fright.

‘My son, what is the matter?’ Her fat greasy arms encircle the frightened boy and he collapses. She carries him away like a baby to her hut and there, after removing the thorn from his thigh and washing his many wounds, she makes him drink a bowl of sleep-causing luika water, and he falls fast asleep.

‘I think he must have seen an animal in the forest,’ says Vunakwe,

the third wife, to Ojoyo later.

‘My son is no coward,’ snaps Ojoyo. ‘I still insist he must have been frightened by an evil spirit in the forest, Oh *Vunakwe*; he saw one of the demons which afflicted his father only this morning. Dare you try to contradict me?’

‘I do not wish to argue with you Ojoyo,’ says the peace-loving *Vunakwe*. ‘It is best that we ask the child himself if he awakes . . .’

‘If he awakes?’ Ojoyo explodes. ‘If he awakes? Do you wish my son not to wake up then *Vunakwe*? Do you want him to die?’

‘No, no!’ cries *Vunakwe*, cringing from the advancing Ojoyo. ‘My tongue slipped; I meant to say *when* he awakes, believe me.’

‘You witch, you know very well

that you meant what you said. I am going to . . .’

But she gets no further as her attention is claimed by another of the wives of *Lumbedu*.

The sun was high in the silver skies when the boy *Mulumbi*, who had come running into the kraal on the previous evening, crawled painfully into *Lumbedu*’s hut and knelt near the low entrance, facing his many parents who regarded him with bloodshot eyes and blank expressions on their haggard faces.

‘Father,’ said *Mulumbi* at last, ‘I have something to tell you and I only ask you, please, to believe me.’

‘What is it?’ snapped *Lumbedu*, who was as bad a parent as he was cowardly and selfish. ‘Speak up and then get out!’

‘Father,’ said the boy, ‘we were out hunting wild cats with the other boys from Songozo’s village yesterday afternoon; we went farther and farther into the forest until we reached the Zambezi and then started to follow the river eastwards. We did not find any wild cats but we did find a young buck which we speared and roasted and shared. We were still eating when Mbimba stood up and gave a loud shout of great fear. We all threw down our meat and grabbed our spears and bows thinking that some animal was about to attack us. “Look over there – what is it?” cried Mbimba. We all looked and saw something terrible coming up the Zambezi. Believe me, my parents, it was something terrible!’

‘What was it?’ chorused *Lumbedu* and *Ojoyo* together.

‘It was a canoe, a very big canoe, father. It looked like a terrible serpent of the waters. Along its side ran two rows of long paddles and a great sheet of what looked like a skin was stretched on a long stick that hung on many ropes across a tall pole that stood in the centre of the giant canoe. There were three great knives attached to the front end and a carving shaped like a man, with hair as shaggy as a lion’s mane. The other boys fled, my father, but I decided to hide in the grass to see what the canoe would do next. It came nearer and nearer ...’

‘My brave little son,’ murmured *Ojoyo*. ‘Go on, what happened

next?’

‘To my surprise, the canoe came closer and closer to the river bank and then it stopped. I saw men running on its top and the long rows of paddles being drawn up. Great metal vessels were lowered to scoop up water – lowered on ropes down the side of the great canoe. So near was it that I could see the many men on it quite clearly and they were the strangest looking men you ever saw. They had pink skins – they were pink all over; they had hair like the mane of lions – hair that fell to their shoulders. Some had hair as black and shiny as that of a panther, some red as fire. But one had hair the colour of corn in autumn. It was terrible – I was so afraid I just lay in the grass,

all strength gone from me. I saw some of the men leap over the sides of the great canoe; they leapt naked and with their long hair flowing behind their heads. They leapt into the water and started swimming and splashing in the Zambezi like so many pink fish. Some were wrestling and laughing and some just swam about, leisurely, enjoying the cool water.

‘Then a group of them ran out of the water on to the bank and started coming to where I lay in the long grass, too terrified to move. I closed my eyes and lay quite still. I heard their footsteps coming nearer and their voices grew louder. Then I heard a shout as the foremost of them had seen me. I felt a wet hand seize me roughly by

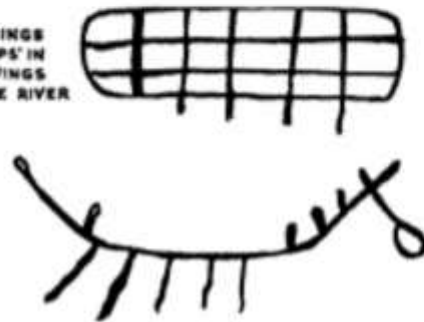
the wrist and haul me to my feet in one movement. I found myself looking deep into the green eyes of one of the strange ones, my parents ...’

‘Iaia-eeee! – no human being can ever have green eyes,’ said Lumbedu. ‘No human being can ever have long hair like that of a lion, and a pink skin. This brat is lying!’

‘Be quiet Lumbedu,’ screamed Ojoyo. ‘I know my children more than anybody else does and I know when they tell lies and when they tell the truth. Mulumbi is not lying.’



CRUDE RENDERINGS
OF MA-ITI SHIPS IN
BANTU ENGRAVINGS
ON THE ORANGE RIVER



By this time the boy Mulumbi was bathed in sweat, his hands shook like leaves in the wind and a look of wild fear distorted his young boyish features. It was Lulinda who first noticed this. Worry clouded her beautiful face and she whispered to Lumbedu: 'Be careful, husband, please be careful; he has had a great shock; he is a very

frightened child.'

'I have never seen this boy like this,' spoke *Vunakwe*. 'He is not a child who is easy to frighten and I know he tells the truth.'

'Continue son, tell us the rest, then you can go and lie down in your hut,' said *Taundi*. 'You are not looking well.'



MA-ITI WARRIOR
FIGURED ENTIRELY
ACCORDING TO THE
BANTU LEGENDARY
DESCRIPTION

‘The strange ones have strange eyes, Oh my parents,’ continued Mulumbi, very slowly and weakly

now. 'Some have blue eyes, some brown, and the one who was holding me had green eyes. But those eyes seem to see through and through you; they make you feel naked and unhuman. I cried and struggled in the strange one's grasp, and he laughed and put me down. Then he gave me something small and shiny and round, something that was metal. But I must have dropped it as I turned and ran and ran with the alien laughter of the strange ones loud in my ears. I ran on and on without even looking behind me.'

Suddenly he fell heavily to one side and lay still. His audience leapt to their feet, but it was Lulinda who reached him first and threw her arms about him. 'He . . . he is dead

... dead,' she choked.

A heavy silence fell inside the hut, a silence as heavy as the veil of time that conceals the future from our eyes. Then Ojoyo began to sob softly.

The story spread like wildfire through the land and within a few days nearly everybody knew about the strange pink human beings in a great canoe that had come splashing up the timeless Zambezi. The boys from Songozo's village who had watched Mulumbi's adventure with the Strange Ones from a distant hill, swore he had told the truth.

The barbed claws of the vulture of fear slowly closed their grip on the frightened land and soon people began to be so scared about

what they had heard that they no longer ventured outside the stockades of their villages and kraals except in groups of tens and twenties.

Warriors armed with long bone-tipped war spears and stone axes escorted women whenever they went to the stream to get water or to the cornfields to reap corn. Drums beat out long warnings that were relayed to the farthest villages, telling people to look out for strangers with pink skins and long hair. Soon all the villages along the banks of the Zambezi were empty of life, having been evacuated by the inhabitants.

Everyone began to live in fear, everybody that is, except two people who were carrying on a

secret and adulterous love affair.

Night had fallen upon the earth like a panther-skin kaross, powdered with silver shining stars, and an ugly brooding silence lay heavily upon the fear-haunted land. Deep shadows, black and forbidding, lay like crouching demons under the trees – shadows that concealed prowling night-hunting animals such as leopards, hyaenas and jackals. Only a madman dared walk into the forest in the middle of the night; only a madman – or a man on fire with passion and desire for another man's woman and who was willing to risk his life by keeping an adulterous appointment in an abandoned village on the bank of the Zambezi.

Chikongo, the son of Mburu, was the name of this man. He was actually risking his young life to keep an appointment with another man's wife – and that wife was Lulinda, the youngest wife of Lumbedu, the most feared witchdoctor in the land.

The heart of Chikongo pounded like a mad thing within him. He reached the abandoned village deep in the forest, the village which he and Lulinda had been using as a 'place of secret appointment' for one month now. He stood waiting just outside the fallen gate, his stone axe firmly gripped in his right hand, ready to deal with any animal that might emerge from the village to attack him. He stood thus for a long time until just as the

moon rose above the trees in the east a low call sounded from the bushes close at hand. *Lulinda*! His stolen *Lulinda* had come . . . she had come!

Chikongo threw down his axe and jumped into the bushes with his hungry arms outstretched before him. *Lulinda* met him with a ferocity only a shade greater than his own and the love-demented pair went sprawling into the prickly embrace of a thornbush.

Chikongo picked himself up ruefully and helped *Lulinda* to her feet. Once more the lovers sought each other's arms, though in a more dignified and less violent way. *Lulinda* pressed herself fiercely against her lover's muscular frame, her nails digging deep and

painfully into Chikongo's broad back, drawing blood. She kissed his pulsing neck, his ears, his forehead and his chest. Then she rubbed her nose fiercely against his. Then she broke free from his iron clutches and danced away with a low husky and musical laugh. The moonlight danced in her great big eyes like a silver ghost over a stream.

'Oh, my stolen one,' sighed Chikongo, 'I thought you were not coming.'

'I very nearly did not come. I think that bloated female crocodile Ojoyo is getting suspicious. She kept on peeping into my hut to see if I was there, but I tricked her. I do think that this should be our last appointment.'

His arm about her slender waist,

they walked into the deserted village, unaware that many eyes were now watching them. Cautiously Lulinda and Chikongo entered the largest of the huts which happened to have a big hole in its grass roof, through which moonlight streamed, making a big splash of silver light on the pitted mud floor of the hut. It was here that the young man did an incredibly foolish thing – he did not explore the great hut first to see if it was really as empty as it seemed . . .

* * *

Lulinda woke very slowly and found to her surprise and horror that she had slept so long that dawn was breaking. The sky was red in the east, and soon the sun would rise in all its glory, bringing with it a new

day. Her heart beating faster than usual, Lulinda tried to sit up, but found to her great astonishment that she was securely bound hand and foot – and so was Chikongo, who was still fast asleep beside her. Nor was that all . . .

Standing around them in a semicircle were six of the fantastic pink men whom the dead boy Mulumbi had seen and now they were in full battle dress. Tall and handsome in an unimaginably alien and fantastic way, the terrible Strange Ones towered above the frightened girl and her sleeping partner like colossal statues of pink flesh and shining bronze armour.

Each of them now wore a cuirass of heavy bronze scales and a helmet with one or three crests and what

was obviously the hair of some animal. Two of them wore shining bronze leggings, and all of them carried shields either of leather studded with iron or bronze, or of iron with bronze bosses. All carried heavy iron-headed spears and all wore at their sides what were obviously deadly swords.

‘Now I am dead,’ thought Lulinda. ‘Now we are both as good as dead.’

It was just then that Chikongo woke up and an expression of great surprise spread across his face. His mouth dropped open and his eyes widened. He looked as surprised as a fish that had just discovered its parents were a frog and a lizard!

The Strange Ones roared with laughter at this and Lulinda was

astonished to discover just how human their laughter was, and how warm and genuine it sounded. This was not the hollow laughter of Evil Spirits, but that of very amused men, differing in colour, features, hair and form of dress from Chikongo's and Lulinda's race – yes, but human beings none the less. Then the one who seemed to be the leader of the Strange Ones put a question to Chikongo in a strange language that reminded Lulinda of a clear stream murmuring in the cool depths of a forest.

But they could not understand one another and eventually the voices of the red-headed Strange One and Chikongo became aggressive in tone.

It was the youngest of the

Strange Ones who saved the situation. He came forward and looked down at Lulinda and beckoned her to look at him, which she at last managed to do. He pointed to himself, then to his companions – and then he pointed to his own mouth and stomach. Then, from his leather pouch he took out a piece of meat and glared at it in a most menacing way, bit off a piece and then spat it out in great disgust. Again he pointed to himself and the rest of his companions, then eastward once more. He then counted his fingers and toes and raised his hands with all fingers extended to indicate ‘ten times twenty’.

A smile budded and burst into flower on Lulinda’s lovely face and

she nodded vigorously to show she understood. Then the brown-haired, blue-eyed Strange One counted fifty times on his fingers. He indicated on his bronze-scaled chest the breasts of a female and he counted twenty-three on his fingers and made a gesture showing 'little person'. Again Lulinda smiled and nodded rapidly.

'What are you both here grinning about?' Chikongo demanded. 'You seem to be getting quite friendly with this dangerous beast, Lulinda.'

'I understand what they want; he says there are two hundred of them in the east down the river and fifty of them are females and twenty-three of them are children. He says they are tired of eating meat and are hungry for other food. I think

they are human beings of a sort – I am quite sure they are human.’

‘Listen, Lulinda,’ growled Chikongo, ‘these things here are no more human than I am the son of a web-footed rhinoceros with seven tails. I am positive they are some form of evil spirit come to destroy our people. Do not let them get you under their spell.’

‘Do not bother your great and all-knowing brain on my account, beloved one,’ smiled Lulinda. ‘The only spell I have fallen under is the spell of understanding. I think we should take these people to our Chief Chungwe.’

‘You mean you should take these people to him, Oh pleasure of my veins,’ smiled Chikongo. ‘You forget that if I go with you, people will

start asking a lot of embarrassing questions, my love. They will want to know just what we were doing in the forest at night to begin with and, as you know, our tribe has a very unpleasant way of dealing with boys and girls who commit adultery and I have no wish to be shorn of my manhood and flung to the nearest crocodile, you know.'

'I know,' said Lulinda. 'I do not need you to remind me of that.'

Meanwhile the Strange Ones were also engaged in animated conversation amongst themselves, a conversation in which the giant red-bearded leader and the brown-haired youth talked loudest. Once or twice the tall red giant took a step forward and half-drew his sword, snarling threateningly at

the younger man, who only threw up his arms and laughed impudently at the infuriated giant.

At last the red-bearded one seemed to yield to whatever the young man had suggested and it was not long before the bonds on Lulinda's and Chikongo's wrists and ankles were cut. Then the brown-haired blue-eyed one cocked his curly head to one side and looked questioningly at her. She and Chikongo led the way through the forest towards the village of Lumbedu the witchdoctor.

It was one of the strangest and most fantastic processions of all time that wound its way through the great forest that morning. First came Lulinda, walking proudly in front. Then came Chikongo, whose

nerves seemed to grow more and more taut with each step. Beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead like morning dew on a leaf, and he was as tense and as agitated as a kudu bull which has just caught the faint scent of a marauding lion.

Behind him came the shining company of the Strange Ones – twenty in all, some of whom had been in the other huts of the village during the long discussion between the Strange Ones and Lulinda. Their tall crested helmets hid half of their finely carved features, except their eyes, noses, firm thin-lipped mouths and square chins. Only three of them wore beards, besides the heavily armoured full-bearded giant who was their leader.

They moved through the forest like a serpent of living, shimmering bronze, each as alert as an angry lion, cold deep-set eyes scanning the forest with the lofty contemptuousness of gods – as if they were ready for anything that might try to attack them, and all too happy to strike it down.

There was one man in whom Lulinda and Chikongo had become very interested indeed; this was the one at the very end of the glittering line of armed men. He obviously belonged to a race totally different from the Strange Ones, whom he resembled only very slightly. His skin was much darker and even his dress was totally different from that of his companions.

While the Strange Ones wore

under their armour short tunics of what looked like cloth, this man wore nothing save a green and black striped loin-cloth. While the Strange Ones had long flowing hair, this man's head was clean-shaven and he wore a tight-fitting green leather cap on his head. He was totally unarmed; the only item he carried was a big leather bag containing rolls of what seemed like calfskin, small clay jars of medicine of different colours, ranging from white to deep blue. He also carried many pointed reeds and strange sticks with tiny tufts of animal hair at one end. This odd man walked with a slow step and an expression of unfathomable bitterness on his face and Lulinda wondered about him greatly; was

he one of the Strange Ones or was he a captive, or slave? But she was to find out very soon.

Lulinda saw the village of Lumbedu in the distance, sitting like a circular scar on the domed forehead of an ancient hill. Chikongo, who had also seen the kraal at the same time, drew Lulinda to him, swiftly kissed her forehead and nose, and vanished in the forest. But the two young culprits knew nothing of the fact that a pair of eyes had seen them from the bush, the eyes of the last person on earth whom Lulinda would have wanted to discover her secret love affair. They were the eyes of Ojoyo, the First Wife of Lumbedu no less, and that boded ill for the lovers.

Lumbedu, the witchdoctor, was lying on a pile of leopard skins in his hut, pretending as usual to be very sick. He groaned and whined and writhed whenever one of his many wives entered his hut, but laughed and chortled and patted his greasy stomach when he was alone. It was while his Third Wife, Vunakwe, was holding a bowl of milk to his spatulate and blubbery lips that Ojoyo's strident voice crashed through the hut, edged with great fear and urgency.

'Hide the children; take them out of the kraal into the forest. Lulinda is coming – she is bringing the Strange Ones with her,' she cried. 'The Strange Ones are coming!'

Tumult, and confusion twice confused, burst like a violet

poisonous flower through the kraal; screams, bawls, shrieks and the yapping of dogs tore the astonished skies apart. Women and howling children ran hither and thither like frightened goats among the huts. The fat ebony-black Second Wife, *Taundi*, grew so wild with fear that she threw her youngest child into a great bowl of ground corn and ran squealing fatly out of the kraal. She ran like a woman gone mad, down the hill and straight into *Lulinda* and her glittering companions.

The astonished Strange Ones saw a black mountain of a woman come tearing down the footpath and then leap high into the air with an unearthly, smothered shriek, and fall like a great female

hippopotamus into a very prickly thornbush, as unconscious as the dreams of yester-year.

Lulinda paused and placed her small hand on her unconscious rival's fat chest. On finding her alive, she beckoned to her foreign companions to follow her. As they passed into the distance, Taundi slowly recovered consciousness and staggered to her feet, to start running again, faster than before, farther away from her husband's kraal, deeper and deeper into the dark forest.

Midday found her still running, sobbing hoarsely and bathed in sweat – but still running. She ran until she burst through into a clearing in the centre of which stood a village whose gate and

stockade were lavishly decorated with human skulls, ribs and thigh-bones. Taundi recognised the village as that of Dimo, the Dreaded One, King of the Cannibals. With a loud scream she turned and stumbled back into the forest, but it was too late.

A crowd of slim and very beautiful female cannibals came running out of the village with Dimo himself bringing up the rear. With loud squeaks and giggles of unspeakable joy they chased the panic-stricken Taundi through the forest until she dropped from sheer exhaustion. They seized her and frog-marched her back into the village with loud shrieks of laughter. They took her to a roofless hut where three great pots

were already filled with water at the boil. The last thing Taundi saw on this earth was an incredibly beautiful young cannibal woman with filed teeth and heavy copper ornaments that blazed in the sun. A wicked-looking copper knife was clutched in the young cannibal's small hand.

‘We see you, oh breakfast,’ said the cannibal girl quite sweetly. ‘We see you and are thankful for your having come to feed us.’

Lulinda entered Lumbedu's silent kraal with the Strange Ones close behind her. She raised her voice and called out, but nobody came. Then she began a systematic search through the kraal, finding nothing but broken pots and calabashes, spilt sourmilk and a sick dog lying

behind a hut. She was about to give up her search when a muffled sneeze exploded within one of the great round sisulu granaries. She looked into the basket and there, crouching fat and monstrous and terribly afraid, was the great witchdoctor himself, bathed in sweat and quaking like a bowlful of sour porridge. 'Don't tell them,' he whispered. 'Please don't tell them I'm here!'

Like the disloyal and disobedient wife she was, Lulinda went to the gate of the kraal and beckoned to the Strange Ones to follow her. She calmly indicated the basket in which her fat lord was hiding. Lumbedu let out a loud scream of fear as he saw three bronze helmeted and pink-faced heads

looking down into his basket. He uttered a loud scream as the basket was hacked to pieces by the giant leader of the Strange Ones, who then sheathed his big sword and hauled *Lumbedu* out by one arm.

Lumbedu wetted his loinskin and the Strange Ones roared with laughter. While the red-bearded giant and the brown-haired young man held the quaking witchdoctor forcibly erect, *Lulinda* explained the situation to him and when she had finished the young Strange One turned and snapped a few words to the odd man with the green striped loincloth and skull cap and concluded by kicking him soundly in the buttocks.

The odd man picked himself up out of the dust and sat down on one

of Ojoyo's grindstones. He then opened his bag and, spreading its contents on the ground before him, he selected one of the rolled sheets of what looked like calf-skin and one of his pointed reeds. This reed he dipped into a small jar containing a black fluid and began tracing patterns and what looked like human figures on the roll of skin. Before the astonished eyes of Lumbedu and Lulinda, the odd man was making a long series of drawings on the calfskin roll – he was telling the story of the Strange Ones. He was telling in clear, unmistakable and beautiful pictures why the Strange Ones left their country and came to the Country of the Black Men.

First he showed a savage battle

between the Strange Ones and another race with long flowing beards and hair. Then he showed the Strange Ones being routed in a charge by foot soldiers and warriors riding on fantastic vehicles drawn by strange beasts with long flowing tails and manes, like zebras without stripes. After this he showed a number of canoes with long poles in the middle and he drew figures representing the Strange Ones fleeing towards these canoes in wild panic.

He showed the males of the Strange Ones fighting a brave rearguard battle while figures, obviously female and young, clambered aboard the canoes. The canoes were then represented in full sail over what was obviously

water with fish and crabs swimming below the surface. He drew a circle representing the sun and made a hundred strokes under it.

‘A hundred days,’ breathed Lulinda.

Silently, ignoring the interruption, the odd man showed battles between Strange Ones and wild beasts, lions and elephants and leopards, battles that the Strange Ones, with their superior metal weapons always won. He dropped the now full calfskin and took out a second one.

Lulinda screamed when the odd man finished the first picture on the second sheet. The picture showed two black figures, male and female, embracing under a full

moon near an old and dilapidated cluster of huts, and those two figures represented Chikongo and herself.

Unknowingly, unwittingly, the odd man was betraying Lulinda to Lumbedu, her husband. And soon, on the silent sheet of calfskin, the whole nocturnal adventure was exposed, up to the time when Chikongo kissed Lulinda for the last time and fled into the forest. There, on the silent parchment, the trembling Lumbedu not only read the story of the Strange Ones, but also that of Lulinda and her secret partner. All was set out in clear lines and many colours as plain as daylight. The adulterous love affair of his youngest and favourite wife stood out for all to see.

The odd man then started to explain in pictures that the Strange Ones were more than willing to trade some of their weapons for any foodstuffs, except meat. Then, after that, the red-bearded leader and the younger brown-haired man dropped *Lumbedu* contemptuously on the ground and started, together with the other Strange Ones, carrying off some of *Lumbedu*'s full corn baskets. But for every basket they took they left a spear, an axe, or a knife behind – all superb weapons of gleaming steel or bronze.

While this was going on, *Lulinda* saw the odd man with the green striped loincloth leap over *Lumbedu*'s kraal stockade with two stolen swords in his hand and

vanish into the forest.

The Strange Ones left after drinking every drop of milk in the kraal and after the ever-smiling young man with the brown hair had stood over the prostrate and still badly scared *Lumbedu* taunting him cruelly in sign language for his great cowardice. It became plain to *Lulinda* that the Strange Ones had not yet noticed the odd man's escape.

Ojoyo and the rest of *Lumbedu*'s wives and children did not return to the kraal until well after sunset. They found *Lumbedu* staring in blank fascination at the pile of weapons the Strange Ones had left in exchange for the corn. The first thing Ojoyo did on coming into the kraal was to root out *Lulinda* and

call her an adultress to her face, describing in vivid language how she had seen her being kissed by Chikongo in the forest.

Lumbedu was still suffering from the after-effects of his great fright and could not think or talk straight, so his wives took the law into their own hands and bound Lulinda securely hand and foot in preparation for her ceremonial execution on the day to follow. They beat the helpless woman with their skin skirts, burned her thighs with hot stones, spat on her and blew their noses at her. They seized her breasts and pulled them until she shrieked with pain and, before they left her, they forced her to drink the entire contents from Lumbedu's clay urinal.

They were not being cruel; they were only doing exactly what the law and the customs of the tribes of the Dark Land say should be done to adultresses before they are executed. Then on the following morning, Ojoyo sent her eldest son *Gumbu* to the kraal of the Tribal Avengers with the request for the arrest of *Chikongo* as an adulterer.

Now, the Tribal Avengers were a group of men over whom no chief had any power and who had no tribal loyalty. They were men dedicated to the destruction of all those who broke tribal customs and, being members of no particular tribe, their assistance could be enlisted by anybody from any tribe. Even the chiefs lived in fear of the fanatically dedicated

Avengers and many, in our land's strange history, are the chiefs who fell victims to the spears of this secret group of men who had chosen to be shorn of their powers of fatherhood and who could kill a woman with the same pitilessness with which they killed a man.

They led loveless, joyless lives, these strange men, living only for the enforcement of the centuries-old customs of the Black Race. Very often nobody knew just who they were because they always wore heavy woven bark masks whenever they emerged from their isolated kraal during daytime.

Thus it was that by midday on that cloudy day, a strange figure was seen coming up the hill on which Mburu's tiny kraal was

perched like a lost bird on a rock. Mburu was the father of Chikongo, who was an only son amongst many daughters.

‘Look, what is that coming up the path?’ said one of the girls to Manjanja, the First Wife.

Manjanja’s eyes were fast losing their sight although she was only four-and-forty years old, and they groped blindly in an effort to see what the girl was pointing at. ‘I see nothing, child,’ she said. ‘Tell me what you see.’

‘It is a man, but he is wearing a chinyau mask on his head and he is clothed from ankle to neck in leopard skin. He is carrying in one hand a big club shaped like a man, a carved club with a big head and ugly face. He has an axe that looks

terrible.'

The half-blind woman leapt to her feet with a choking cry; she knew very well who and what the masked man was. She called urgently for her husband and to Chwenyana, the Second Wife.

'Oh my fathers,' cried Mburu, 'an Avenger!' The Tribal Avenger paused outside Mburu's kraal and called out harshly: 'You in there . . . you, Mburu, the son of Timburu, the son of Chumba, son of Kondo . . . come out and stand outside the gate of your kraal, which I will not defile my feet by entering. Come on out and hear what I have to say.'

Mburu came out, a proud, brave man who had once been a leopard hunter until a leopard mauled his right arm, paralysing it forever. He

stood facing the dreaded Avenger without fear and without expression on his strong, bearded face.

‘Speak, Avenger, I listen.’

‘Your miserable son, whom I shall not defile my mouth by mentioning by name,’ said the Avenger, ‘has slept more than once with one Lulinda, who is the youngest of the females of one Lumbedu who pretends to be a witchdoctor. Your wretched son knew very well what he was doing and he knew that stealing another man’s love-mat from under him is a breach of custom, punishable by any kind of slow death that the insulted man may choose for the offender. And since Lumbedu has sent a complaint to us, we are

positive that your son is guilty and we have already sentenced him to death. So your son is now bound by law to go to Lumbedu's kraal and receive the death he so richly deserves. Do you have any questions to ask?'

'No, Avenger, we have none,' Mburu replied, choking back a sob. 'If you say my son is guilty then he is guilty.'

'Now I shall make a trail of cowrie shells from here to Lumbedu's kraal,' said the Avenger, 'and your son must come out naked and follow that trail – he must be at Lumbedu's kraal before sunset, and he must be dead by evening.'

As Chikongo dropped his loinskin and took leave of his parents, his mother Manjanja clung desperately

to him, her only son, crying bitterly and saying: 'Oh, Oh light of my fading eyes, my child, why . . . why did you do it?'

'I do not know, mother,' whispered Chikongo. 'Goodbye now, mother.'

'My son,' said his father, 'do not be afraid. Just show that fat bloated dog of a Lumbedu how Timburu's grandson can die. Die like a warrior, my son; die with a smile on your lips as your warrior grandfather died.'

As Chikongo took the last cowrie-strewn journey of his young life, Mburu drew his weeping wives into his hut and took an Oath of Vengeance in which he swore to kill the witchdoctor Lumbedu one day, even if it took him years of

waiting.

It was in the afternoon when Chikongo came through the gate of Lumbedu's kraal and to his own great surprise he felt utterly unafraid; in fact, he felt very angry and actually wanted to die. As he entered the kraal he saw Ojoyo and the rest of Lumbedu's wives standing in a scowling semicircle, leering, with bone or copper knives in their hands. Beyond them he saw the tall Avenger standing with folded arms next to Lumbedu and his son Gumbu, who was now armed with one of the metal spears the Strange Ones had left.

'Come on, you foul bitches,' cried Chikongo. 'Come on and get it over with?'

'No, my boy,' said Ojoyo, with a

nasty smile, 'we shall come on, but we shall not get it over with in a hurry. You shall suffer a lot before you die. I would like to hear you scream for mercy before we despatch you.'

'You shall never make me whine, you dirty slut,' snarled Chikongo. 'I am not your husband who squeals like a pig when you so much as point a finger at him. Come on, do your worst.'

And do their worst they did. But never once did the brave young man cry out, even when his entire lower abdomen had become one bloody mess of spurting blood and tattered flesh. They held him down, but he never so much as attempted to struggle and at long last he opened his mouth and gave

one long shuddering gasp.

‘Now you are going to squeal, my bush-pig. Come on, let us hear you squeal,’ Ojoyo cried.

‘No, you foul she-hyaena,’ gasped Chikongo. ‘I shall not cry out. But I am feeling very sorry for you all. Today you kill me, but tomorrow, or a few moons from now, you . . . you too shall be dying. You have fallen like trapped flies into the web of Death and soon he shall come and consume you all.’

With that, the son of Mburu, son of Timburu, died. He died as his valiant father had told him to die; he died as his grandfather Timburu had died so long ago – bravely, without a murmur.

‘He cursed us . . . he cursed us with his last breath,’ sobbed

Vunakwe, who had taken no part in the ghastly execution. 'We are all cursed.'

'Be silent, you weak-bellied bitch,' snarled Ojoyo. 'Some of you bring out Lulinda quickly.'

Lulinda was dragged out of her hut and flung brutally upon her dead lover's body and all eyes turned towards the tall masked form of the Tribal Avenger for further instructions.

'Did you make the raft?' snapped the Tribal Avenger to Gumbu, the son of Lumbedu.

'Yes, Mighty One, we did.'

'Then drag this adultress and this dead dog out of here to the riverside and tie them together face to face. Roll them on to the raft and tie them firmly to it. Then push the

raft into the river – the scaly crocodiles shall deal with both dead and living. I have spoken.’

How long Lulinda drifted down the Zambezi she did not know; it seemed like aeons and aeons. Her body was numb and her brain was fast approaching the valley of madness. She kept her eyes tightly shut all the time because whenever she opened them she stared into the wide-open eyes of her dead Chikongo. The cruel leather thongs that tied her to the raft were biting into her flesh like red-hot copper knives, and the wake of blood – Chikongo’s blood – that the raft was leaving behind, was attracting whole tribes of ravaging crocodiles. Something huge, scaly and long-snouted clambered on to the raft

and fastened its teeth on the dead man's leg, towing the raft nearer to the south bank of the river. But just when Lulinda had given herself up for dead, she saw a canoe creep into her limited field of vision, a canoe that turned its prow and bore down upon her raft and the swarming crocodiles clustering about it. Lulinda saw that there was only one man in the canoe – she could see him clearly silhouetted against the last glow of the dying sun.

The darting canoe rammed the raft and tore it out of the crowd of crocodiles swimming around it. Then Lulinda felt a weapon of unbelievable sharpness cutting her bonds to pieces. She felt strong hands snatch her out of the very jaws of a crocodile. She had a

glimpse of a smiling thin-lipped mouth, a straight nose and a pair of bright black eyes. She saw a face handsome in a strange alien way – a face she had seen before. It was the face of the odd man who had escaped from the Strange Ones at Lumbedu's kraal. Lulinda passed into the vale of unconsciousness in the arms of the light brown-skinned foreigner.

The legends say the odd man took Lulinda away to the safety of the great forests in the south of what was in later years to be known as the land of the Varozwi people. There the odd man gathered all the small tribes and clans and welded them into one mighty tribe to which he tried to impart some of the arts and the knowledge of his

faraway native land. Even today the tribe this tawny-skinned foreigner founded is known throughout the land of the Black Tribes as the only one that practises the strange art of fortune-telling by gazing at the stars. The Varozwi is the only tribe practising mummification of its chiefs. Before a young Varozwi prince can assume the headdress and kaross of chief, he is forced to spend four nights in a cave in which are the mummified bodies of his father and ancestors. He must pray to each of these desiccated corpses for strength and wisdom and demand from each a blessing and a spiritual light to show him the road of life.

But, apart from the fact that the odd man founded the Varozwi

Tribe, no clear details of his adventures and eventual death have reached us from across the gulf of time and his is one of the few stories in the land of the tribes where the story-teller must speak but a few words and be silent, because there is no more left to tell, for Time, that devouring monster, has devoured the rest.

Gumbu, the rascally son of a rascally father, knelt before his fat parents Lumbedu and Ojoyo and gave them advice – advice that was to affect thousands of lives and change the history of the whole southern part of the land of the tribes; advice that was to lead Lumbedu along the downward path to the valley of undoing and a miserable death.

Gumbu told his parents that since they were the only people who knew what the Strange Ones wanted, they should be the only people to trade big baskets full of corn, yams and pots full of milk for the superior iron and bronze weapons of the Strange Ones. With these weapons, *Lumbedu* could easily seize power and rule the whole land as a High Chief. Gumbu pointed out with jackal-like cunning that a few men armed with these metal weapons could easily rout a whole army armed with bone-tipped spears and stone axes, as was the case with all the armies of the tribal chiefs at this time. It must be remembered that at this time the only metal that Black people knew was copper,

with which they made ornaments and knives for stabbing only.

The selfish, ambitious old charlatan *Lumbedu* fell down on his hands and knees and actually kissed his son's feet like a beggarly slave for the suggestion he had made and the next few days saw a brisk trade between *Lumbedu* and the ships of the Strange Ones, which came crawling like many-legged sea serpents up the Zambezi river. *Lumbedu's* wives and daughters would put full baskets of corn or yams in a particular place on the bank of the Zambezi and then beat a tattoo on a big drum before retiring into the forest. The ship of the Strange Ones would then edge nearer to the bank and its occupants would pick up the

baskets, leaving a pile of spears in exchange. Within five days, the witchdoctor had enough weapons to arm close to two hundred men and it was then that Gumbu gathered together a small army of ruffianly cut-throats and armed them with the deadly metal spears and swords. In one short, savage battle he overthrew the High Chief of the land, *Chungwe*, and slew him on the doorstep of his own Royal Hut.

Lumbedu became a High Chief in one day. The gross, whining and utterly selfish wretch suddenly found himself waddling like an overfed vulture at the head of twenty thousand subjects and the heady fumes of the mead of power and ambition made him drunk as

yesterday's nightmare. He wanted to conquer until he ruled the whole world and traded and pleaded with the Strange Ones for more weapons and still more.

His wild, undisciplined armies tore like wildfire across the shocked land and chief after chief fell before the new weapons of metal, and tribe after tribe was enslaved. Gumbu's savage hordes swept southward into the land of the ancient people known as the Ba-Tswana who, blessed by the Great Spirit itself centuries earlier, had been living in peace for generations. Here, in this land, Gumbu demanded that the defeated tribal chief, Mulaba, should give him his daughter Temana as a wife and as a hostage, and he took this

lovely maiden back home with him to Lumbedu's kraal after leaving governors to hold the land in his father's name.

On the way back, however, Gumbu was stricken by the eye disease called *karkatchi* and became totally blind in less than six weeks. Then one night *Temana* led the blind Gumbu to the very edge of a great cliff and pushed him over before leaping to her own death. The legends say that where *Temana* fell at the base of the cliff a cluster of tiny sweet-smelling red wild flowers soon grew, the origin of the *letemana* flowers which still grow there among the rocks to this day.

Meanwhile Lumbedu had become the undisputed chief of the biggest empire the tribes had ever seen –

an empire that sprawled from the Inyangani mountains to the shores of the western ocean. What is so amusing about *Lumbedu's* empire and reign is that it lasted only one full year and eight moons.

While *Lumbedu* bathed in the sunshine of power and drank deep from his beer-pot; while his woman *Ojoyo* bedecked herself with hundreds of gleaming ornaments and had numerous slaves to obey her every wish and the land trembled at the mention of *Lumbedu's* name, a strange conference was taking place in the great grass village the Strange Ones had built for themselves at the mouth of the Zambezi river.

Four men sat around a wooden table inside a great four-cornered

grass hut. One of these men was a tall bearded red-haired giant with the scars of many battles on his massive body and the other was an old man with long hair and a flowing beard that was as white as mountain snow. This old man wore broad circlets of gold, studded with precious stones, around his head and he wore a long tunic of purple cloth, over which he had thrown a flaming red cloak. The third man was of the same race as the odd man who had saved *Lulinda* and he had a white loincloth painted with strange and mysterious signs in red and black. On his head he wore a headdress of blue and red striped cloth and a yellow cobra reared menacingly above his forehead from the golden band around his

head.

The fourth member of the council was a happy-looking brown-haired young man with blue eyes who entered the council hut long after the first three had been sitting. He had entered the hut with mischief dancing in his bright eyes and had then proceeded to make faces at the red-bearded giant before giving his big broken nose a playful tweak.

‘You are late, my son,’ said the old Strange One.

‘That I am, my father, is your fault. You gave me a wife at my tender age and now half my nights are without sleep. You see . . .’

‘Be quiet, the King awaits your report and not details of what you do at night with your wife,’ roared

the red-haired giant.

‘My son,’ said the white-haired King gravely, ‘we are here to discuss a serious matter and not to jest. All we want to know is whether our plan is working properly – the plan of supplying the fat Lumbedu with weapons under the pretence of trade and then letting him conquer his own fellow people for us. We would like to know whether he is still unaware of our intent to come in once he has finished and to take over from him.’

‘Our plan is working well, beyond our wildest dreams, my father,’ said the young man. ‘Even now our bloated greasy friend has added yet another tribe to his empire and it will not be long

before a great empire, with thousands of slaves, falls into our hands like ripe fruit.'

'We cannot afford to wait much longer – we must strike now. Where we had a hundred separate tribes to conquer, we now have only one fat son of a vile hippopotamus to strike down and all his empire shall be in our hands,' said the man with the loincloth.

'I agree,' said the King. 'We have waited far too long. Tonight we must attack that dog's village.'

Lumbedu was feeling on top of the very stars, let alone on top of the world, and he was as happy as a starveling beggar's stomach which has just digested a stolen fowl. He was as happy as a lion with a

million teeth and a thousand mouths.

Now if Lumbedu was as proud of his being a chief as a lion with many mouths, his First Wife Ojoyo was as proud of her suddenly finding herself a queen, as a vulture with many gizzards. Every morning she was carried in an elaborately carved litter to the riverside by a veritable bevy of beauties from her husband's harem and there she was bathed, smeared with crushed *tambuti* leaves all over until she smelt like a big fat sweet-scented flower. Then she was bedecked with copper necklaces and bracelets. She feasted all day long on wild honey, corn cakes, very fatty meat, and greasy yam stew.

She was shrill and cruel to the

rest of the wives of *Lumbedu* and she could kill any one of them on the slightest provocation. She was, however, a woman with two guilty secrets lying heavy on her rotten soul and both these secrets would have earned her a slow and miserable death at the hands of the Tribal Avengers, had they become known. Firstly, she had poisoned the kind-hearted *Vunakwe* who had been *Lumbedu*'s Second Wife and had buried her secretly in the hut where she, *Ojoyo*, always slept. And she had lied to *Lumbedu* by saying that *Vunakwe* had fallen into the *Zambezi*.

Secondly, *Ojoyo* had a secret lover whom she kept imprisoned in a cave in the forest and whom she always visited whenever the flame

of desire burnt within her. This secret lover was a young boy of eighteen years and Ojoyo knew that seducing a person of that age who had not been initiated into adulthood according to custom was an offence punishable by death. No persons under twenty-five are allowed to so much as kiss, or be kissed by, members of the opposite sex.

Ojoyo had never asked her prisoner lover who his parents were and all she knew about the youth was that his name was Kadimo. Kadimo had been captured by Lumbedu's warriors while wandering aimlessly in the forest and, being a member of an unknown tribe, he had been brought into Lumbedu's kraal for

questioning and execution. Kadimo, however, could not speak the language of *Lumbedu*'s tribe and his only answer to the harsh questioning by the warriors as to the name and whereabouts of his tribe, had been nothing but a series of pathetic head-shakings. Ojoyo had suddenly felt herself drawn to the godlike youth Kadimo and had asked *Lumbedu* to give her the captive ostensibly for torture and killing, but in reality to imprison him in a cave and use him as a secret source of pleasure.

On the fateful day when the Strange Ones had finally decided to attack *Lumbedu*'s village during the coming night, *Lumbedu* and Ojoyo had been feasting in their great hut from early morning to late

afternoon. They had been celebrating twenty-five years of marriage according to tribal custom; they had eaten together a whole raw flamingo and then drunk a bowl of milk mixed with honey. They continued their gigantic feast with fowls and roasted meat washed down with pots full of cornbeer – till they passed into the valley of unconsciousness together. Now nobody else in Lumbedu's kraal had been invited to this private feast, because only the man and his wife should be present during the ceremony of the 'Eating of the Flamingo'. The result of this was that, although Lumbedu and Ojoyo were lying drunk and insensible in their hut, everyone else in the

Great Kraal was as sober as the morning breeze.

A man came running into the kraal at about midnight – he had been running through the forest for he knew not how long – and he had come to warn *Lumbedu* that the Strange Ones were advancing up the southern bank of the Zambezi in full force and that their intentions were definitely not friendly, as the now dead villagers whose headman this man had been, had found out. The man found sentries at the gate of *Lumbedu's* kraal and to them he whispered his story before he collapsed at their feet.

‘I am the headman of the village of *Lumoja* – quickly, warn the High Chief that the Strange Ones are

coming. They mean war – they have killed all the people in my village and will soon be here.’

While two of the guards ran to warn everybody in the kraal, one stopped to help the fallen man to his feet. But he discovered that the man’s back was covered in blood and that there was a long deep wound under his left shoulder-blade. Only sheer willpower and great courage had kept this brave man running for so long, while badly wounded.

Panic reigned supreme in Lumbedu’s kraal that dark and star-spangled night. People fled naked out of the threatened kraal into the doubtful safety of the forests. Screams tore the night as some were pounced upon by leopards

and night-hunting lions. Instead of standing and preparing to fight to the death in the kraal of their High Chief, the undisciplined and disloyal warriors of *Lumbedu* launched their fleet of battle canoes and escaped into the night carrying off *Lumbedu's* many wives and concubines with them to safety across the Zambezi.

Meanwhile *Lumbedu* and *Ojoyo* still lay in drunken stupor inside their hut where they had defied the best efforts of their subjects and children to wake them up. An hour before dawn something must have warned *Ojoyo* because she stirred uneasily and woke up. A few moments later she crawled out of the hut, urged by a strange sense of uneasiness that suddenly burst into

flower in her soul. She called out to the night guards at the gate, but no one answered. The whole kraal was mysteriously deserted.

This stunning fact penetrated deep into Ojoyo's drunken brain and a terrible fear tore through her, leaving her as sober as the morning dew.

Then somewhere in the forest she heard the steady sounds of marching feet and the clash of metal on metal coming nearer and nearer. She sensed the murderous purpose behind those sounds and the dead man at the gate confirmed her worst suspicions. Ojoyo screamed in terror.

She ran back to the Royal Hut and tried to waken Lumbedu by shaking him violently and calling

his name repeatedly. But he only turned over on his back and snored louder than ever.

An alien war-cry shattered the starry night like a blow from a knobkierie as the Strange Ones burst into the kraal like a horde of mad bronze-clad demons from hell itself. Ojoyo crawled out of the Great Hut like a scalded snake and made her escape through one of the small emergency gates in the stockade, leaving the drunken *Lumbedu* to his fate.

First one and then the other of the two guard-huts flanking the gate burst into flame as the attackers set them on fire. Soon the whole lower portion of the kraal near the main gate was a mass of flames and redly glowing clouds of

billowing smoke. The Strange Ones began to ransack the empty huts and to remove hundreds of sourmilk calabashes and dozens of baskets full of corn and yams. These they placed in the centre of the vast clearing before they set the huts on fire.

It was then that *Lumbedu* awoke and crawled drunkenly out of his hut and stood swaying on the raised clay doorstep.

‘You . . . why are you burning my kraal?’ he cried thickly.

A group of Strange Ones came running towards him, brandishing swords and gleaming bronze spears, but *Lumbedu* was far too intoxicated to be scared and stared blearily at them, standing his ground.

One of the Strange Ones aimed a sword blow at *Lumbedu's* head, a blow that was not intended to kill or to injure, but which passed harmlessly over his shiny bald pate. *Lumbedu* balled his fists and stood his ground, not even blinking.

One of the Strange Ones said to the King's brown-haired son: 'Behold, how brave this fat barbarian is; he has chosen to remain behind while the rest of his people escape. I did not know these black pigs could be so brave.'

Suddenly *Lumbedu* began to dance, urged by nothing less than the fumes of the strong beer he had drunk in such quantities. He stamped and capered like a mad gorilla up and down the firelit clearing in the centre of his

burning kraal. He puffed and stamped and grunted and shook until his fat feet stirred up clouds of dust around them. Then, for a reason which even he could not understand, he snatched a spear from the hands of one of the astonished Strange Ones and ran himself through with it.

The young prince of the Strange Ones stood over the body of the dead *Lumbedu* and for once he was not smiling. He shook his helmeted head and said: 'He was a very brave man. He chose death instead of slavery – just as we would do.'

'Let us take what we can and leave here,' said the prince a while later. 'I'm sure that my father will be pleased to hear that he is now the Emperor of a great land full of

thousands of black, thieving dirty-skinned barbarians!’

The traitor *Lumbedu* who had played into the hands of the Strange Ones and had betrayed hundreds of thousands of his people into slavery, was dead, but of his woman, *Ojoyo*, a story remains to be told.

Ojoyo paused once in her wild flight through the forest and, looking behind her, saw the two huts near the main gate in flames. That blood-chilling sight caused yet another spurt of speed and she ran even faster than before. In the course of her flight she heard the sounds of a wild animal in the forest and stopped dead in her tracks with her heart in her mouth, until the beast had gone past. At

last she came to a familiar stream which she knew flowed past the cave where she was keeping the youth Kadimo a prisoner. As the grey light of dawn touched the sky, Ojoyo found the well-worn path that led up to Kadimo's cave and followed it slowly and wearily as it twisted and turned past great rocks and boulders. As she approached the cave, a squat ugly figure detached itself from the rock behind which it had been hiding and barred her way.

‘Ho! Who you?’ growled the ugly one. ‘You go back or you die.’

‘It is I, Ojoyo, my trustworthy Zozo,’ said she with a smile at the hunch-backed and unbelievably ugly idiot whom she had placed to guard the youth Kadimo day and

night.

‘Zozo see you, Queen,’ said the idiot, dropping on his knee.

‘Open the cave for me, Zozo, and then you can go into your own cave and sleep,’ Ojoyo commanded.

The powerful hunchback rolled aside the boulder that stood in the entrance of the cave and then fled into his own cave. Ojoyo entered the prison cave and felt around in the darkness for her youthful captive.

‘Wake up, Kadimo,’ said she, ‘wake up, my love.’

For a long time after that Ojoyo and Kadimo sat side by side in a dark recess of the cave conversing in low voices. Ojoyo told the youth about what had happened in Lumbedu’s kraal that night and

concluded by saying she feared Lumbedu had been killed.

‘Now you . . . belong . . . Kadimo, . . . all his,’ said the youth who could by then speak a few words of the language of Ojoyo’s tribe.

‘Yes, Kadimo.’

‘When dawn comes, we . . . go away . . . back to my village. You come . . . back with me.’

‘And Zozo too?’ asked Ojoyo.

‘No, Kadimo hates Zozo . . . Kadimo wants Ojoyo . . . alone.’

‘As you say, Kadimo.’

By midday of the day that followed Ojoyo and Kadimo were far away from the burnt-out kraal which Ojoyo had ruled with cruelty and insolence only the day before.

Ojoyo was beginning to become very afraid of Kadimo as his

attitude rapidly changed from one of respect to insolence. He had now stopped calling her Queen and addressed her as 'you'. He even threatened to beat her up if she tried to sit down and rest. But the greatest surprise was yet to come.

'I'm tired, I want you to carry me on your back, you fat cow,' he indicated in a broken tongue.

'Fat . . . fat cow!' gasped Ojoyo. 'Did I hear you call me a fat cow?'

'Yes . . . you fat cow,' said the youth. 'Now bend down . . . and carry me.'

'Never!'

Kadimo's great knobkierie thudded solidly against Ojoyo's royal ribs many times. She screamed and writhed and rolled on the ground as Kadimo gave her

the greatest beating of her life. At long last the pain became such that Ojoyo began to whimper like a child and to beg Kadimo not to hit her again.

‘Why are you so cruel to me?’ she sobbed. ‘I am your Queen.’

‘You are my supper . . . you are my edible queen!’

‘What, you mean that you are a cannibal!’

‘I am Kadimo . . . son of Dimo . . . son of Sodimo . . . my father . . . King of the Cannibals.’

‘But you can’t eat me, beloved one,’ pleaded Ojoyo. ‘I love you and I am still beautiful . . .’

‘You . . . more beautiful . . . in stewpot. Tonight . . . we come to father’s village. Come . . . carry me!’

How long Ojoyo carried the youth she did not know – it seemed like hundreds of years. When she stumbled and fell, throwing Kadimo, he always got up to beat her cruelly before getting on her back again. On and on she stumbled until the skies became as black as midnight and bolts of bluish lightning began to scourge the tortured heavens, while peal after peal of thunder shook the very roots of the earth. Kadimo prodded his human steed to the shelter of the forest where they found a small cave and in this cave Ojoyo found a chance to rest.

‘Not far from . . . father’s village. When arrive . . . Kadimo shall have . . . nice slice . . . for supper.’

‘Kadimo . . . I beg you . . .’

But she got no further as a squat, hunchbacked and incredibly ugly shape burst into the cave and seized Kadimo by the ankle, dragging him outside into the howling rains. There was a short savage struggle, a loud gurgling scream and silence. Then the bowlegged and hunchbacked monstrosity called Zozo, who had trailed them relentlessly across the plains and through the forests, entered the cave.

‘Zozo!’ cried Ojoyo. ‘You saved me – he was going to eat me!’

‘Yes, I saved you, but not for long. You knew Vunakwe?’ asked the hunchback.

‘Yes, I knew her very well; she fell into the Zambezi and . . .’

‘You lie shamefully . . . you killed

Vunakwe, and Zozo is Vunakwe's brother.'

'Vunakwe had no brothers, I knew her father, her whole family.'

'Father of Vunakwe . . . never owned that Zozo was his son, because Zozo a deformed thing. Zozo always lived alone. Now you die.'

'No Zozo! You saved me . . .'

'Die Ojoyo!'

A copper knife stabbed down fiercely . . . once . . . twice . . .

* * *

After Lumbedu's death the Strange Ones came out into the open and took over the astonished land. Soon hundreds of people began to feel the sting of the slave-driver's whip within the borders of their own native land. Dozens, scores of

kraals and villages stood empty, their inhabitants having been forced into the Strange Ones' ships and taken away across the seas, never to be seen again.

The shocked land saw sights it had never seen before – long lines of men, women and children tied together with chains like living beads on a string, hauling sleds of stones the Strange Ones used to build great forts all over the land as far south as beyond the Herero. The shocked land also saw thousands of its black sons made to dig into the bowels of the earth like so many ants, to bring up iron ore, copper, and the yellow 'sun metal'. The Sacred Iron Mountain of Taba-Tsipi, or Taba-Zimbi, became a mass of tunnels in which tens of

thousands of chained slaves worked and died.

Long trains of oxen and even tamed zebras began to wind their way eastward over mountains and across plains, heavily laden with gold, iron ore and ivory, to be loaded on to ships of the Strange Ones and taken across the sea.

Elephants and hippos – the animals hitherto regarded as sacred by nearly all the tribes – were butchered by the Strange Ones from one corner of the agonised land to the other, the elephants for their ivory and the hippos for their bones and blubber.

Many tribes fled from the wanton destruction and oppression of the Strange Ones and some of these tribes even reached that

country which is now Swaziland.

Contrary to those who claim to know about the Black people, the Swazi people did not branch from the Nguni tribes that migrated into the lands south of the Limpopoma about eight hundred years ago. The Swazi and the Bomvana tribes came south of the Limpopoma much earlier than did the Nguni. When the Nguni came, they found the Swazi had degenerated to such an extent that they no longer built villages, but lived in trees like monkeys; hence the popular insult of 'Tree Dwellers' the Nguni (from whom the Zulus sprang) applied to the Swazis.

The Swazis adopted the culture and even the language of the Nguni, which they speak with a

hissing accent. They even adopted the weapons and the battle tactics of the Nguni. The Swazi are well known for their habit of wearing their hair very long and even dyeing it red with clay and wild root juices. They still imitate the long hair of those long-dead White men who invaded the Black land more than two thousand years ago.

The Strange Ones established great plantations near the Inyangani Mountains and here thousands of slaves also toiled, planting, hoeing and reaping corn and other crops which the Strange Ones had brought from their native lands. Even today, traces of these fantastic plantations that legends say were fertilised with hacked bits of bodies of dead slaves during

winter, still survive for all to see and marvel at. These are known today as the terraced plantations of Inyanga. No Black people ever farmed in the terraced style.

In the course of time, more of the Strange Ones came to settle in the land, together with members of that hated race called the Arabi, which was to wreak so much havoc in our land in years that followed. Many of the Strange Ones took wives from the Lawu (Hottentots) and from the Batwa (Bushmen) races and many became the sons and daughters of Strange Ones and Yellow Ones.

Fifty years after *Lumbedu's* death the Strange Ones began to build many cities and villages in the land. But the biggest and most

important city was on the shores of lake Makarikari – today a vast shallow salt pan.

This city was big enough to contain more than a thousand people, the legends say, and it was surrounded by a strong stockade of wood with stone towers at regular intervals. A deep ditch, filled with water, went completely around the city, rendering it utterly impregnable to attack, and the only entry into the city was over a short wooden bridge across the ditch into a gateway. A great settlement sprang up around the city in the course of time as hundreds of traders, slave-raiders and ordinary settlers built their homes outside the city walls, and there raised their families.

The Strange Ones began to multiply in the land, although fever and all-too-frequent epidemics killed many of them. As a result of their trade with lands beyond the great waters, the Strange Ones amassed fantastic wealth in their homes and cities and they lived their lives in great luxury. Today, one still finds in the possession of Bantu witchdoctors incredibly old and rusted swords with bronze hilts, swords so old that their blades crumble at a light blow with a stone. There are unbelievably old ornaments of gold and silver and bronze – ornaments that are neither Bantu nor Arabi; worn, pitted and even distorted by age – ornaments that are today very jealously guarded by Tribal

Historians and High Witchdoctors as the Secret Charms of the tribe. These ornaments are still used today in secret rituals and they still keep the memory of the Strange Ones fresh in Tribal Story-Tellers' minds.

As time went on, the empire of the Strange Ones, like all things based on murder, oppression and theft, began to take the downward path of decay. The number of ships that crawled up the mouth of the Zambezi began to lessen gradually and many of the sites where gold, iron and copper had been mined were abandoned and forgotten. Gradually the empire of the Strange Ones was isolated from the world outside and the Strange Ones turned more and more of their

attention to making their lives as full of luxury and pleasure as possible. Soon the lives of each and every one of them became one long orgy of song, dance, food and drink. They invented new and fantastic ways of entertainment. They had idols before which they performed orgies both revolting and utterly fantastic. The legends say that some of their queens and empresses began mating with beasts in attempts at finding new sources of carnal pleasure. Some even tried to mate their daughters to lions in an attempt at producing a new race of men who were supposed to combine the courage, endurance and ferocity of lions with the intelligence of human beings.

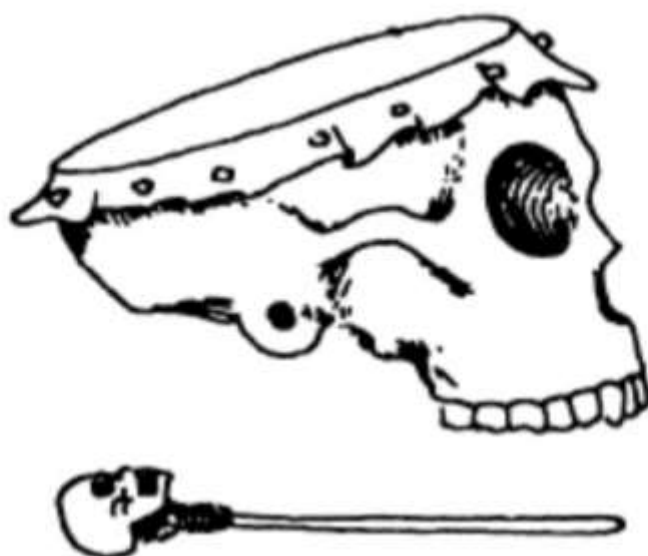
The legends also say that one of the Emperors of the Strange Ones had a young man for a Queen and he used to kill women, both of his own race and of the Bantu race, with great cruelty, as entertainment.

It is said that the Emperors of the Strange Ones called themselves the 'Children of the Star', because they claimed to have descended from a star that fell on earth, which took a young woman of the Strange Ones and had sons by her.

The next part of this strange story of the Strange Ones begins with the birth of a man called Mukanda, or Lumukanda, the Destroyer, who was destined to play a major role in the history of the Strange Ones. Lumukanda was born of slave

parents in one of the filthy underground stalls where the slaves were kept in the great city on the shores of lake Makarikari.

**SKULL DRUM USED IN
MACABRE MA-ITI RITES**



He grew up a slave who knew no other kind of life except that of a slave. To him, as to all others born in slavery, the word freedom meant absolutely nothing and he lived only to be commanded and to obey.

He was nothing but a puppet, dancing and capering at the commands of cruel masters.

By this time, the Black race between the Zambezi and Limpopoma rivers had been all but totally annihilated and the only free people there were the dead ones. At the time when the mighty hero *Lumakanda* was a youth of sixteen the empire of the Strange Ones was suddenly split violently into two as the result of a war between the White Emperors whose names have come down to us as *Kadesi* and *Karesu*. (These are not their true names; the Tribal Chroniclers have corrupted them in the course of time.)

When the story (which custom commands us to tell in

Lumakanda's own words) commences, this war between the quarrelling foreign rulers had just ended in defeat and flight for Kadesi, and victory for the unnatural Karesu who had a male and not a female consort.

And so, my children, now begins the strangest story of all – the second sequel of our great Zima-Mbje Story, the grand epic that is still sung and chanted by many tribes even today, the undying story of the undying man who loved a goddess and who changed the destiny of an empire.

THE STORY OF LUMUKANDA

THE WHISPERING NIGHT

Night had fallen, but the feasting in the house of the man who owned me went on without pause. The great hall was one blaze of light from the many torches burning steadily inside. The sounds of merriment were loud in my ears as I stood guard at the gate with my friend *Lubo*.

Many were the masters who

came into the gate, but few were those who went out – and they left only because they were so full of good food and so drunk they could eat and drink no more.

Some left our owner's house on gilded stretchers carried by slaves because they had passed into the dark valleys of unconsciousness as a result of the vast quantities of beer and wine they had consumed. One of them came out in the most un-masterly fashion, being dragged out by the hair by no less a person than our owner's son, and flung head over heels down the clay steps of the great house into the dust. We learnt later that this worthy had been treated in such a fashion because he had heatedly told the owner of the house that rather

than see the mad and unnatural Karesu ruling the Empire, he would have Kadesi on the throne. That was treasonable talk and Lubo and I agreed that the offending master had got off very lightly indeed.

The moon rose and its eerie light gave the white-painted houses of the great city a delicate, ghostly quality that had to be seen to be believed. Beyond the brooding stockades that guarded the city like a crocodile's jaws, the huge expanse of water that was Makarikari became one fantastic sheet of living silver. A few stars sparkled faintly in the heavens, fighting a losing battle against the grey soft light of the sacred orb of the night and the song of thousands of crickets was loud.

There were no thoughts of what the future held for me; I had no speculations over what was in store for me. I, and the rest of my shackled race, led our lives like the beasts of burden we were; it was of no use for us to speculate or to dream, because daydreams make a slave's life more intolerable than the chains around his ankles and neck.

A rasping voice rang out from the top of the steps behind us: 'Lumukanda, the second slave, the master calls for you.'

It was the old man, Obu, the first slave, who was in charge of all of us younger slaves in the master's house and grainfields. I turned and ran up the short flight of steps and then stood with bowed head just

inside the door of the great hall. The masters and their females lay, or reclined, on gilded wooden couches along the three walls of the great high-roofed hall. Along the fourth wall, on either side of the door, stood cup-bearer slaves. Female slaves were carrying big baskets loaded with fruit, meat and corncakes, all ready to replenish the cup or the plate of any of the masters who might so wish.

There were small ivory-legged tables near each couch. On one stood the shining beer-cups while on the other stood the cake trays and meat plates. I could not help noticing that most of the masters now paid more attention to the beer cups than to the meat trays. The masters wore nothing save

golden necklaces and bracelets, and white cloaks which they had only thrown around their waists because of the humidity. The females wore only light skirts and many golden bracelets and necklaces. A few even had broad golden bands around their heads. Their hair, ranging in colour from red to brown and to jet black, cascaded about their smooth shoulders like living smoke. Through the ringing of loud laughter and buzz of talking came my owner's voice from the far corner of the hall:

‘You there, at the door, come to the middle of the hall.’

‘As you command, Master,’ I called out, drawing myself erect and stepping into the open space in

the centre of the great hall.

‘Look at him,’ roared my owner to the rest of the masters. ‘Look at that tall black brute – only sixteen and yet as tall as an adult and just as heavily muscled. I am willing to wager two big elephant tusks full of gold dust that none of your slaves can beat him in a sword fight.’

‘Taken,’ shrieked one of the others – a White woman. ‘I have a female slave who can tear that brute of yours to pieces!’

‘What do you wager?’ demanded a chorus of excited voices.

‘Four cups of gold and two golden plates,’ snapped the black-haired female.

‘Taken!’ cried my owner. ‘Go and fetch your bitch and let us have a good fight tonight.’

The woman snapped a command to one of her slave boys and he flew out of the hall into the night. Then my owner ordered a bronze helmet and a sword brought and given to me to arm myself with. The helmet was shaped like a human head and had a nose and two holes shaped like eyes; it covered my face completely. The sword was of iron with a bronze hilt and was both sharp and very heavy, with a needle-sharp point. It was the same sword I had used in six previous fights – fights between me and fellow slaves in which I always had the doubtful honour of being the winner.

‘Fight well and win, second slave,’ roared my owner. ‘Fight well and win or, by the demons of hell, I

shall cut your dirty black throat and fling your smelly carcass to the dogs!’

I drew myself up with pride and raised my sword high in salute. ‘I shall fight and win, Oh Master, I shall win as I have always won before.’

‘Insolent pig,’ hissed the White female whose slave I was due to fight. ‘We shall see about that.’

Putting women fighters against men was one of the new ways of entertainment the Strange Ones had invented. But I had never had to fight a woman before and also, as I stood there waiting, a strange feeling of uneasiness began to grow within me – so much so that at one time I almost felt like dropping my sword and running out of the hall.

A few moments later, my tall female opponent came striding through the door wearing, like myself, a helmet and carrying a long sharp sword. Like me, too, she was naked save for a green loincloth around her broad womanly hips. She went to where her mistress lay on the couch like a glittering snake and prostrated herself in salute. Then she saluted everybody else in the hall by raising her sword.

‘Fight,’ snapped her mistress. ‘Kill him, quick!’

Like a striking mamba, the fighting woman whirled upon me, her sword thrusting viciously at my stomach. But I sidestepped and the flashing sword only gave me a slight, though painful, cut in the

side. Then I closed with her and our blades flashed and whirled in the torchlight, both of us fighting like the trained killers we were. Twice she wounded me with the darting point of her blade and twice I returned the compliment. For a while neither of us gained any advantage, then at last I forced her to give way by wounding her deeply in the thigh and above the left breast.

By this time the hall was in uproar, and none of the masters and their females was sitting any more; all were on their feet like so many bloodthirsty children and shouting encouragement to first one and then the other of us. Wagers flew back and forth and the owner of the female slave, stung to

anger by my owner's vicious taunts, shrieked angrily that if I defeated her fighting woman, she would become my owner's wife for the night.

‘Not for the night only,’ cried my owner. ‘Not for tonight only, but for ten more nights!’

‘Yes,’ snarled the female, ‘if your slave wins.’

My adversary began to press me savagely now. She seemed anxious to end the fight as quickly as possible by killing me. Her sword was nothing less than a hissing silvery blur and only my skill saved me from being fatally wounded. Then at last I struck a blow at her that all but cut off her left breast. She fell with a loud cry of agony and my sword point entered her

chest.

Loud cheers rang through the hall as I knelt down and removed her helmet to take to my owner as a trophy.

As I removed the helmet, the woman's agony-clouded eyes opened and a look of great puzzlement and surprise spread over her dark beautiful face. She was looking at something on my chest, the black, moonshaped birthmark that stands out against the dark-brown of my body. She could not see my helmet-masked face and she could not see the tears that came welling into my eyes as I recognised her. She was the woman whom I had known most intimately once upon a time – sixteen years ago when she carried

me in her womb, brought me forth, and suckled me.

‘It is your mother,’ whispered the old man Obu unnecessarily.

Sixteen years before, as a young girl, herself born in slavery, she had been mated to a young slave by the Slave Breeders, and had conceived and given birth to me. Like all slaves with suckling young, she had spent two years in the underground slave stalls where breeding took place, nursing her baby – me. After another year, when I was three, they took me away from her and I had never seen her again until this fateful night.

But she had not forgotten me and she particularly remembered the strange crescent-shaped birthmark on my chest, the birthmark that

had excited the other slave mothers so many years ago.

Blind with tears I tore my helmet off and threw it to the floor. With great difficulty she opened her mouth and said: 'My son . . . you are my son . . . *Lumukanda!*'

'Forgive me, mother . . . Oh, forgive me . . .' I cried.

'Dear child,' she said with a strange pitying smile, 'I forgive you. You did not know – I could have killed you too. I am glad it is I, not you, who die.'

'Mother, don't die, don't die,' I cried.

Her eyes closed as I held her tightly, madly and desperately to my tear-bedewed chest. I looked up briefly to find that the hall was fast emptying of people. The masters

were leaving in groups of threes and fours with their females, their laughter ringing loudly as they went into the moonlit night. My owner had already retired to his room with my mother's mistress and soon only my friends, *Lubo* and *Obu*, were left with me in the silent hall. Then my parent's eyes opened for the last time and once again she smiled. Her hand reached up and stroked my cheek briefly before dropping limply to the floor. Faintly she said: 'My child, you . . . great deeds . . . someone great . . . loves you. Be brave . . . strong, my son . . .'

And with that strange smile of incredible tenderness and pride on her lips she died. I could have killed myself with grief such as I

have never known, before – or since.

Obu, Lubo and I laid my slain parent to rest in a deep grave on the shores of the silvery lake. We buried her in the way the Strange Ones buried their dead, lying on her back with her hands at her sides. Her helmet was on her head and her sword was in its scabbard beside her tall body.

‘Farewell, my parent . . .’

I could hardly stand, let alone walk, and Obu and Lubo had to support me as we went back into the moonlit city. As we approached the great gates, over the bridge spanning the deep water-filled ditch, a loud cry tore the quiet night and a body came hurtling down from the top of one of the great towers that flanked the city

gate, plunging into the moat with an unbelievable splash – immediately sinking like a stone.

‘Another murder,’ cried Obu. ‘It is the second one in three days. What is this city coming to?’

‘I know who that was who fell in there,’ said Lubo. ‘It is the male wife of the High Emperor Karesu. Gods – great immortal gods, now there is going to be trouble!’

A harsh voice called out to us as we entered the gate, the voice of the leader of a troop of bronze-clad White guards who had come running to investigate the scream and the splash.

‘Ho there, slave dogs. Halt! Who was that who fell into the moat? Answer!’

‘We do not know, Master,’ replied

Obu, bowing low.

‘What are you dogs doing outside the city walls this time of night?’ snarled the commander of the guard.

‘They went out to bury a dead fellow-slave, Commander,’ replied one of the guards. ‘I saw them as they went out past the guard house.’

‘Where did the one who uttered the cry fall from?’ demanded the commander.

‘He fell from the top of this tower, Master,’ replied Obu, pointing to the tower on the left side of the gate.

‘What race was he?’

‘He was one of the master’s, Master.’

The guard commander turned to

his men and shouted: 'Some of you get up there quick. You, slaves, stay here and do not move.'

The guards went pelting up the long flight of steps that went up the solid stone tower. Suddenly a white-clad figure came running down the steps of the other tower and flew like a mad ghost up the main street leading to the centre of the city. The commander, together with two of the guards who had remained behind, turned with a loud shout and gave chase.

'Come on, my sons,' said Obu to Lubo and me, 'let us get to our owner's home quickly. But do not run; these streets will soon be crawling with soldiers.'

He was right; we were only a few blocks away from our owner's

house when squads of fully armed soldiers came clanking past us on their way to the gate and alarm horns sounded in the silver night, calling all available warriors to man the towers and the stockade around the city.

‘I wonder if they caught whoever it is that was running up the street,’ mused Obu.

‘I would not like to be in his place, whoever it was,’ laughed Lubo, as he went up to the tall gates of our master’s house.

Suddenly Lubo pointed excitedly to our right. ‘Look, look there.’

‘Where?’ cried Obu.

‘Over there, on the corner of the garden wall, look.’

We turned and, following his pointing finger, saw a sight that

sent shivers of excitement along our spines. A tall white-clad figure had just climbed the high wall surrounding our owner's garden and was about to leap within.

‘It is the fugitive who ran away from the tower,’ said Obu grimly. ‘Let us get into the garden quickly and seize him.’

Like stalking wild cats we entered our owner's well-tended grounds and began our search for the white-clad fugitive whom we felt sure had pushed the male consort of our city's male Emperor into the moat. We all knew that if we let this fugitive hide himself in the gardens it would mean death for all of us and for our owner as well.

It fell to me to be the one who

found the assassin, and a great surprise it was as well. I had gone well ahead of both Lubo and Obu when I heard people talking in low voices just round the corner of our owner's house. I dropped on my knees and crawled along the grass slowly and carefully until I could see around the corner of the great house. To my great surprise I saw the thickset, bearded man who owned us standing on the steps of the back door of the house and talking to the veiled white-clad figure of our quarry who stood on the ground looking up at him. I caught the last words of my owner's address to the fugitive.

‘. . . well indeed, but you must come into the house before someone sees you, your Highness.’

‘Your Highness . . .’ The words struck me like a blow! Who, then, could the midnight fugitive and murderer be? In the whole of the empire there were now only two people left alive to whom the title of ‘Your Highness’ could be applied. The first of them was, of course, the High Emperor himself; the other was his dead brother’s widow whom I had never seen, but about whom I had heard a lot of fantastic rumours.

The visitor entered the house like a white ghost. Then came the next surprise of that memorable night. Loud shouting in three different voices erupted within our master’s house and the voices were those of our owner himself, his son, and the woman who had been

my mother's mistress. Then the blood-curdling sounds of a murderous sword fight, punctuated by the crash of breaking furniture, reached our shocked ears as we turned and ran to the front to get the long spears we carried when guarding our owner's house at night. A loud, quavering scream split the night air as we reached the front entrance. Then we heard the voice of my mother's former mistress shrieking loudly and accusingly:

‘You killed him . . . you killed your own son, you foul murderer! But I am going out to tell the Emperor that you are plotting against him. You false traitor . . . you are trying to play a double game. I shall tell the soldiers you

are hiding this bitch in your house!’

The door burst open and the woman came running out, wrapped in a blue cloak, with her hair flying behind her. Our owner was close behind her, bleeding from a cut above one eye. ‘To me, slaves, seize her . . . kill her . . . quick!’

WHAT SECRETS HATH HEAVEN?

For a few moments we hesitated as the female came running towards us. Then we sprang to obey our owner and barred her way just as she reached the gate.

Lubo pushed her violently and she stumbled backwards just as the master drew back his arm and threw his needle-sharp sword with all his might at her back. We heard the thud and the female fell backwards with the blade protruding from her bosom. 'Your parent has been avenged, Oh Lumukanda,' whispered Lubo in my ear.

Never before had I seen a night in which so much happened at the same time. Never before had I experienced a night that left so many memories in my mind. By the time we finished our task of burying the two dead Strange Ones and cleaning up the master's house, dawn was not far away and in fact, the eastern sky was beginning to lighten. Three very tired slaves descended the stone steps leading down to the underground stalls where other slaves were sleeping.

'Ka-whew!' said Lubo. 'Oh my doddering father! What a night we have had!'

'Be quiet, my son, and sleep,' said

the old man Obu. 'We shall soon have to get up, so try and get what sleep you can.'

But I could not sleep and dawn found me tossing and writhing in the vermin-infested grass piled on the damp floor of my sleeping stall. My mind was in turmoil and I could not think straight. But uppermost in my seething, troubled mind was the realisation that I was guilty of the worst crime any man can ever commit – the murder of my own parent.

Pictures, clear and astonishingly real, flashed like thunderflashes through my troubled brain: pictures of my childhood and my mother as I remembered her then – the silly sounds she used to make when I cried. But I recalled most

clearly the little toy she had made for me out of wood – a puppet I used to play with in my lonely hours. I cried and moaned in incurable agony and remorse. But I knew that no matter how long and how loud I cried I could never, never bring my parent back again. I knew with a terrible finality that whether I lived a short life or a long one, I would carry my guilt to the grave.

I cursed the masters, I cursed the gods and I cursed myself bitterly for what had happened. But always present in the back of my mind was the realisation that all this would never bring my parent back again. I suddenly found myself longing for death.

Morning came and we all crawled

out of our sleeping stalls – twenty male and sixteen female slaves in all – and followed Obu to the lake for our morning wash. As I bathed in the living water one of the younger female slaves Luluma waded up to me and laid her small hand on my chest, asking: ‘How do you feel today, Oh Lumukanda?’

‘I wish I were dead, Oh Luluma,’ I replied. ‘I really wish I were dead.’

‘Try and forget, Oh my brother-in-suffering,’ said the girl soothingly. ‘It was not your fault – it was their fault.’

‘I will never forget what happened last night for as long as I live,’ I said. ‘No water on earth can ever wash my parent’s blood off these guilty hands.’

‘Do not judge yourself, Oh Lumukanda. We are the playthings of

fate and can never be responsible for all that we do or what happens to us any more than toys are responsible for what the playing child does with them.'

'The Old Ones tell us there are gods somewhere,' I said bitterly, 'but I am afraid these so-called gods are but figments of some . . .'

'No, Lumukanda!' cried she. 'Do not say that.'

'I shall say what I please,' I sneered. 'If there are any gods, or if there is the Great Spirit, why in the name of all that is foul and rotten do they let such things happen to human beings? Why are we slaves and the Strange Ones our masters? Why is there so much misery, murder, theft and strife under the sun? I dare any of those non-existent, imaginary, somnolent, gods-so-called to . . . to . . .'

'Lumukanda!' gasped the girl. 'You are blaspheming. You might regret your words one day.'

And she was right.

After finishing our morning wash we followed the old man Obu into the master's house to present ourselves and to do obeisance before him as was the custom amongst slaves. As we entered the master's great hall we found him sitting on his great couch with his two young concubines, one on either side. But there was also someone else with them in the hall, someone who did not belong there at all – who was a total and unusual and frightening stranger. This was a tall, well-moulded beautiful woman whose skin was almost as dark as my own and who looked like the daughter of a Strange One and a Black woman. This woman wore a tight-fitting garment that reached from her midriff to her ankles. On her arms and forearms she wore heavy, broad and skilfully engraved gold bracelets while around her shoulders she wore a great white cloak made of a woven,

shiny material. Around her head she wore a broad golden band and she looked at the world through a pair of deep-set glittering eyes with lashes as long as the first joint of a man's thumb.

I realised with a shock that she was the white-clad one whom we had seen the night before, climbing over the garden wall. So this was the sorceress – the feared witch Kadesi-Makira – the dreaded opponent of the Emperor Karesu!

From where she sat in the far corner of the hall she flayed us with her pitiless stare as we filed past our master and briefly prostrated ourselves before him and his concubines.

My turn came and I fell on my knees before our owner and crossed my forearms before my face as was the custom. Then I stood up and turned to go.

‘Wait!’

That one single command stung

the silent hall like a slave-trainer's whip-stroke and all eyes turned to the white-clad dark woman who had uttered it.

‘Where did you get that slave?’ she demanded of our master.

‘Your Highness?’

‘I asked you, where did you get that slave?’

‘I bought him as a pup, Oh Great One,’ he replied humbly. ‘Does your Highness know this slave from somewhere?’

‘No,’ said she grimly, ‘I have never seen the dog before in real life. But I do know what you must do to him immediately. Kill him!’

‘Kill him, your Highness?’ gasped my owner. ‘Pray why? He is my favourite fighting slave – he has won many prizes . . .’

‘Fool . . . fool, what a fool you are!’ cried Makira, rising to her feet. ‘Have you never heard of the prophecy about the Dark Destroyer?’

‘The Dark Destroyer!’ cried our

owner, his eyes opening wide with horror and astonishment. 'You mean . . .'

'Yes, my dear White fool, I mean that this slave of yours is none other than the Dark Destroyer whom the old prophets said would be born one day and would, like the vulture of sunset, destroy our empire,' the Queen Kadesi-Makira announced sharply. 'Tell me, has he no strange birthmark somewhere shaped like some well-known thing?'

'He has!' cried one of the concubines. 'A moonshaped mark above his left breast. I noticed it one day when he brought me some wine.'

'I dreamt about this creature last night. I dreamt of the Sun-God telling me he was in this very house!' cried Kadesi-Makira. 'Seize him, you other slaves, seize him! Let me take a closer look at him before he dies. Seize him and bring him here!'

Obu and two other slaves seized my arms and pushed me towards the seated woman who rose and stared fixedly at me for a few moments and then lashed out with her open hand, hitting me hard on one side of the face.

‘Ha!’ she shrilled. ‘It has fallen to me to uncover the foul menace to our empire. We must kill this viper before its fangs can grow.’

They bound me securely hand and foot and they tied two heavy they left me in my sleeping stall under heavy guard until the sun had set and night had crept upon the land like a stealthy panther. I knew that at last death would come and I would soon be with my dear mother. I felt happy and incredibly content. I joked with the slaves and with my owner. I told them to cook a nice dinner for me because I would be back tomorrow. The slaves laughed but the witch Makira and my master were far from

pleased. I had the satisfaction of seeing my owner turn pale.

They loaded me into a boat at dead of night and rowed to the centre of the great Makarikari lake. In the boat were Makira, our owner and his two concubines, and the

four slaves who rowed the alien boat.

At a sign from Makira the slaves pulled in their oars and lifted me up and threw me into the water.

The cold dark water closed over me, smothering me. I felt myself sinking into the dark depths like a helpless stone, down . . . down . . . down . . . into the watery womb of the lake.

There were sounds in my ears and there was heat on my body. Slowly I opened my eyes and found myself looking into the blinding glare of the midday sun.

Quickly I closed my eyes and allowed my brain to work on this incredible fact: I was alive. But I had no right to be. I should be down there in the green depths of

the water instead of lying somewhere on the northern shore of Lake Makarikari! I should be dead instead of hearing the song of the birds in the swamp trees and feeling the heat of the sun on my naked body.

‘Lumukanda!’ The strange silvery voice calling my name suddenly out of nowhere sounded exactly like my mother’s. I felt a rush of incredible strength gush into my body as I leapt up and looked about me.

‘Lumukanda!’ It sounded from somewhere in the forest.

‘Mother!’ I cried. ‘I am coming, I am coming to you.’

Now I was sure that I was dead, that I was not on earth but in the Spirit Land. I knew I was going to

meet my parent soon and be happy for evermore. I ran wildly into the forest and the next thing I knew I was flat on my face in the mud, having tripped over a mangrove root. I sprang to my feet again, ruefully, and looked about. I was covered from head to foot in stinking mud and a voice laughed heartily from somewhere behind me.

‘My parent,’ I cried, ‘please show yourself. Do not make me suffer; I have suffered enough as it is.’

Suddenly my mother stood before me, smiling tenderly, with her sword in her hand and her metal headdress on her head. She stood there, tall and straight and very beautiful, and she smiled at me in a strange tender way – just as she smiled when she died. I leapt forward with my arms open to clasp my parent to my breast. My arms encircled her and I closed my eyes and wept, tears of pure heavenly joy that knows no description. But when I opened my eyes I found myself fiercely embracing nothing but a moss-covered mangrove tree.

The ringing laugh echoed

through the forest again as I collapsed to my knees, sobbing bitterly.

I was going mad . . . I was mad. Someone or something was playing evil voodoo tricks upon me, trying to drive me into the valley of insanity. I must escape. I had to escape from that evil swampland . . .

I ran madly through the forest. Every tree, every rock seemed to have somehow grown a face – a face that opened its mouth and guffawed at me insanely. ‘Run, you murderer – matricidal slave, thief, beggar, run . . .’ and there followed the laugh again, now distinctly maniacal.

How long I ran through that nightmare forest I do not know. But when at last the sun began to set I found myself lying flat on my face in a grassy glade utterly exhausted. My toes were bleeding from all the tripping and falling and I was caked all over with dried mud.

The grass rustled as something came towards me and I buried my

face in my hands and moaned: 'No, no, leave me alone.'

But when at last I looked up I found it was only a stray impala which leapt gracefully and fled for its life when it saw me raise my head out of the long grass.

Some time later I found a small cave in the forest – a cave whose walls were covered with figures of men and animals painted not long before by the Batwa – the Little Yellow Ones. I cleaned out the abandoned cave and lay down inside to rest. I must have fallen asleep because when I awoke night had fallen long since and I was feeling terribly hungry and thirsty. Silently I crept to a nearby stream and drank my fill of the clear, cool water. Then I caught two frogs and ate both of them raw – having no means of making a fire – and finally returned to the cave where I made myself a bed of green leaves and lay down to sleep.

When I awoke it was nearly midday of the following day and I was feeling hungry enough to eat ten elephants. I left the cave and went down to the lake carefully avoiding the forest. A while later I found a game footpath leading to the lake. Here I dug two pit traps and covered them with grass and twigs, hoping to catch a buck or something for food. Then I proceeded to walk aimlessly along the lake to kill time and forget my hunger.

I had been walking for some time when I saw what I took to be an image made of shimmering silver, standing on a rock on the water's edge. It was shaped like a woman – tall and unbelievably well-moulded; it stood with its back to me and I was struck dumb by its utter perfection. It reminded me of those statues of alien gods which the Strange Ones had in their god-houses, or temples as they called them.

Because the Strange Ones had the

habit of putting statues in the most unlikely places I was positive that this was also one of their works of metal art – probably a likeness of some imaginary water goddess.

But so perfect was the image that I was greatly tempted to have a closer look at it, and so I slowly approached it on the water's edge. Suddenly I became aware of a very strange thing: unseen waves of pulsating heat seemed to be radiating from the statue, becoming more intense as I went closer. Bolts of fear tore through my body and I turned and ran as fast as I could up the gentle incline away from the lake. When I felt sure I had put enough distance between the silver thing and myself I paused and looked back. An involuntary cry of horror and great fear was wrung from me by what I saw: The 'statue' had turned and was now looking directly at me. Even as I watched it slowly began to walk in my direction and then it began to

run. With a loud scream, I turned and fled, the mysterious thing in hot pursuit.

I ran along the marshy edge of the great lake, taking care to avoid the forest. But the thing was fast gaining on me. It came so close that I could see it had three heavy breasts, each with a shining green nipple . . . and its eyes were the colour of gold.

Wild with panic I swerved and dived headlong into the lake, swimming away as fast as I could. The thing stood waist deep in the reeds and I heard the ringing laughter I had heard before. Then, most gracefully it proceeded to swim in my direction and the radiance of its body left a trail of steam. What unearthly thing was it? It did not belong to this world – of that I was sure – and it was as out of place as a bird amongst the fish. Abruptly a voodoo voice reached my ears: ‘You had better give yourself up, human being, I will catch you eventually in

any case.'

'What do you want to do with me?' I cried loudly as I increased the speed of my swimming.

The voice came back to me: 'I am lonely and longing for companionship . . . I can stand it no more . . . I long for you . . .'

'No, no!' I cried. 'What are you . . . what kind of creature are you?'

'I am a creature whose existence you have once denied. I am a goddess, and Ma is my name.'

This increased my terror and as she closed in on me I dived under in an endeavour to drown myself. But she hauled me out by my hair and dragged me back to the shore. We had a brief struggle in which I managed to free myself and I made a dash for the depths of the forest. After a while I noticed that I was not being followed. 'I have shaken her off,' I quietly and happily mused by myself.

Cautiously I went to look at my

two pit traps but found to my great disappointment that I had caught nothing. It was while I was staring in disgust at the second trap that I heard a rustling sound behind me. I froze with fright, took a step forward – and, with a savage curse, plunged into my own trap!

The tall, incredibly beautiful apparition of living silver stood looking down at me where I was lying on my back in the pit. A dazzling smile lit her face and she mused gently: ‘Oh my reluctant lover, most stupid and cowardly . . . do you make a habit of digging pit traps to catch yourself?’

‘Aieeee!’ I cried. ‘Go away and leave me alone, you unearthly monster.’

‘You may not be aware of it, but you are equally unearthly, and in this world I have chosen you as my husband. But what an unfortunante bride I am! My new husband goes running like a madman and he even

has the habit of setting traps for himself. Shall we now go to your cave and consummate our marriage?’

‘Listen, you unnatural demon, go back to wherever you come from and leave me alone, do you hear? I am not your husband – I have never heard of such nonsense . . .’

‘Now, now, now, who believes in demons? Did you not once tell a fellow slave that gods and demons are nothing but figments of the imagination? As far as you are concerned I do not exist. I am a figment of your imagination . . . is that not so?’

The apparition sat down on the edge of the pit, her feet dangling an arm’s length above my head. ‘Oh my great grandmother, can’t the thing go away . . . vanish like the unearthly phantom it is?’ I thought to myself.

‘No, beloved one,’ it said with a weary smile, ‘I cannot just vanish

into thin air. In this world I am too real – and besides, far too much in love with you – simply to vanish and leave you alone.’ I had forgotten that the thing could read my thoughts.

I was determined to stay in the pit to the end of time and the apparition, growing tired of my stubbornness, stood up and went away. I decided to wait till night came, so as to make my escape under the cover of darkness. But towards sunset she returned with a bundle of writhing mambas in her hands and coolly threw them into the pit in which I was still lying.

I do not know how I got out of the pit – all I know is that it was considerably faster than the way I got into it. ‘Let us go home, Oh my husband, there is much that we have to talk about.’

Outside, the night was alive with the sounds of animals of all kinds, from the faraway roar of lions to the lonely hooting of an owl in the tree

at the mouth of the cave. Loudest was the croaking of frogs in the marshes on the edge of the lake. In the heavens above the stars shone like so many lost jewels against the dark expanse of the moonless sky. The Fire River, today called the Milky Way, was one broad band of smoky brilliance that stretched from one end of the heavens to the other, and a dethroned star streaked across it as it fell in disgrace.

I was now looking at creation with new eyes, and everything I looked at seemed to have assumed a new beauty – a new freshness. I had been listening to a very strange story: the story of creation – the story of how life came to this earth and the One who was telling me this story was none other than the Creator herself. She told me all about the First People, about *Amarava* and about *Odu*. I was feeling very small, a mere speck of living dust in a universe so utterly incredible.

‘Great Mother,’ I said at long last, ‘but what does one so great as you are want with a wretch like myself. I am hardly worthy of the love of a crawling louse.’

‘Lumukanda, eternity is a vast and incredibly lonely Darkness – and even a goddess has to have someone in whom to confide at times, to escape from the futility which human beings have misnamed Life. I grow tired of roaming the Outer Darkness alone – deceived and rejected by my erstwhile spouse, the Tree of Life – a lost leaf in the Tempest of Eternity. I wish to make a comeback to earth and communicate with the human beings I have created. And I wish to do so through you, Lumukanda.’

‘Goddess . . . I am not worthy of the honour!’

‘Who is, Lumukanda, who is? Who in this mad, evil world is worthy of attention from me? None! But I had to choose someone, and that

someone happens to be you.'

'A blood-stained matricide . . . a slayer of his own parent?'

'Yes, *Lumukanda*, a blood-stained parent-slayer. Because your deed has opened your eyes to the falsehood called Life – which is nothing but a lie and a failure from birth to death. You have experienced Life as but a horrid nightmare in which only pain, suffering and death are real. I have chosen you because you are one of the few human beings who have seen Life most closely for the useless, futile nothing that it is. I can see in you the kind who will never use anybody or anything to gain domination over fellow mortals – simply because you have grown to hate life and all its useless pleasures, its mock glories, the senseless futility of it all!'

'Goddess, how can you, who have brought Life on earth speak thus?'

'Listen *Lumukanda*, I did not create the Universe and the earth,

and life upon it, out of my own free will. I obeyed the order of a Great Master who, for all that even I know, in turn has to obey the orders of an even Greater Master. The heavens conceal more secrets than even I can understand. Even I was told to do as instructed, and ask no questions.'

'Then what is the purpose of life on earth, Oh Great Goddess? Do I understand there is really none at all?'

'The only purpose of Life is Death. A man is born and before he dies he gets the opportunity to ensure that others after him will also be born and die. You may deceive yourself by thinking that there is more to life than birth, growth, mating, old age and death. But, sooner or later, Naked Truth makes itself apparent.'

'Naked Truth – like you, Oh my Goddess?' I said, in an attempt to change the subject.

'Look at the race of men whom you call the Strange Ones. See what

trouble they went to, in coming to your country, seizing it, enslaving your people and despoiling themselves. What have they gained by it all? All they have gained is a useless toy called wealth – and softer couches on which to mate and die. They do not know it yet, but within a few moons you, *Lumukanda*, will go back there to lead a horde of savages, like yourself, to raze their plaything empire to the ground. And men born a mere hundred years from now will look in vain for traces of the Great City of the Empire of *Karesu* and *Makira-Kadesi*. You will leave no trace of it; turn it into a legend. Even thousands of years hence people must search in vain for the Lost City of *Makarikari*.

BEHOLD THE DECEIVER

In the Great City of the Strange Ones there had been chaos and bloodshed. Piles of dead bodies choked the narrow streets. Blood had flowed like water as two opposing forces had clashed like wild cats through the shocked city. But now there was peace and jubilation in the land, because the cruel one, the Emperor Karesu had been overthrown and captured in one short bloody revolt by the followers of the Empress Makira-Kadesi.

As night fell the city blazed with lights. The singing and noise rose higher and higher into the jewelled heavens even as the night deepened. Wild celebrations were in progress

in the Great Palace and people crowded the gardens and the steps of the palace like flies on a pot of honey. Whenever the victorious witch-queen Kadesi made an appearance in the doorway of the Great House with her harp in her hand and her voice raised, singing their 'song of victory', loud cheers split the moonless night from thousands of throats: 'Long live the Lioness, Makira! Long may she reign!'

The last time Makira made her appearance outside, before going back into the Great Hall to preside over the fantastic feast held in her honour, she held her hand up for silence and her voice was high and clear in the night: 'Thank you, my loyal people; thank you for your support in wresting the throne from that madman Karesu who ruled you with such cruelty and with no regard for your feelings. Today I am your Queen, your Empress, and my

greatest aim will be to raise this empire to heights undreamt of by its founders. This I shall do as soon as possible, and I know that I shall succeed. I shall reorganise our armies and I shall strengthen the walls around our cities and villages to make them invincible to any attack. I shall take this empire to the very stars, if need be – and this empire shall bloom like a flower and live forever in the minds of men – as the greatest of all time. Now, before I retire for the night, let us all sing the song of our country: “Oh Flower in the Jungles Planted . . .”

More than ten thousand voices burst into song and the Hymn of the Strange Ones reached against the starry skies. As the last verses, charged with arrogance and pride, ‘We shall fight and we shall conquer again, and yet again for you, Oh purple flower of the wilds,’ rang out through the roaring city, Makira burst into tears and wept

unashamedly before her people.

The crowds were delirious; they went mad. And not one individual there but felt himself capable of crushing the very heavens for the Empress and the land. Such was the magic power that Makira had over her people – the Strange Ones.

Roar after roar of applause followed Makira as she turned and went into the Great Hall, now packed with nobles, battle-leaders and priests.

As Makira-Kadesi entered the glittering hall men and women stood up and met her paralysing stare, while slaves fell flat on their stomachs, prostrating themselves before her dreaded presence. In the heavy silence that followed, her voice rang through the hall:

‘Let us feast, Oh my people, and let us be happy this great and memorable night. Let us make merry now, for tomorrow we have a lot of work to do. We shall work

until we drop, to make this empire the greatest under the sun. We shall work to make this empire the strongest and the most invincible on earth. Tomorrow all of you who have more than ten slaves shall send half of them to our ore mines to extract metal for our weapons and gold for trade. We must make this city so strong that not even a mouse shall enter our city gates unseen. Let the feast begin.'

The feast began; wine and beer flowed like water down the throats of the Strange Ones. Great quantities of meat and foods of all kinds were consumed to the magical sound of music. Dancing females and fighting slaves moved in and out.

The mystic notes of harp, flute and drum filled the gilded hall as toast after toast was drunk in honour of the Empress who sat alone in a corner with an untouched cup in her hand and a worried frown on her face. Suddenly she rose and, in a

tempestuous rage, hurled the wine cup at the face of the nearest slave and drew her dagger from its sheath. She proceeded to dance – a wild, savage dance nobody had seen before, flourishing the dagger above her head like a bloodthirsty cannibal.

‘Bring him out,’ she screamed. ‘Bring out the murdering pig who killed my husband. Bring out the unnatural Karesu. Bring him out!’

The gross, shambling creature named Karesu was hustled into the roaring hall, loaded with chains but still bearing himself like the proud Emperor he had been.

Makira-Kadesi saw him and split the air with a loud scream of unbelievable hatred, leaping high like a madwoman, which she was in fact. She crept up to the bound man like a stalking she-leopard and slashed him cruelly across the belly with her dagger. Then she danced away with a loud shriek of devilish

joy. She circled round him again, dancing like a devil's flame, faster, faster and still faster. Then she stabbed viciously at his eyes, once, twice, thrice – leaving the helpless man's eye-sockets full of torn flesh. Then she danced away again under loud cheers from her bloodthirsty subjects.

‘Let me speak!’ cried the bleeding and blinded man Karesu. ‘Let me speak before I die. Let me speak . . .’

‘Speak, dog, speak before I disembowel you!’ cried Makira-Kadesi. ‘Whine and let me hear what you have to whine about.’

‘I wish to warn you, Oh Kadesi,’ said Karesu, ‘the gods tell me to warn you that the whole empire is in great danger and that if you can save it from this danger it will last forever and climb to the heights you dream of.’

Makira froze where she stood. She had expected Karesu to beg for mercy or curse her; but not the

words he was saying now. And she was surprised even more by the great calmness of his voice.

‘Some time ago,’ continued the dying man, ‘the gods say that some time ago you took a slave out to the lake and drowned him secretly one night.’

‘Whaaat!’ cried Makira. ‘What about that slave?’

‘The gods say he is alive,’ whispered Karesu, as he sank to the ground, ‘Empire in danger . . . while he lives . . .’

‘Where is he? Where do the gods say he is now?’

‘In . . . near here . . . lake,’ gasped Karesu as he died.

‘Guards!’ screamed the Empress. ‘Call the guard commander here . . . quickly!’

While quick-fingered handmaidens were still helping Kadesi back into her attire, two heavily armed guard commanders and a battle leader clanked into the

hall and bowed low before the Empress. She snapped out a few words to them and about an hour later the armed guards marched out of the gate of the city while the patrols in the city itself were heavily reinforced.

The guards left the city and fanned out in all directions in search of the one who had to be killed if Makira's empire were to be saved. Some went along the shores of the lake, while some took boats across the lake itself.

In the meantime the feasting in Kadesi's palace had come to an abrupt end and the guests had left for their homes. For a long while Kadesi sat alone in the silence while the torches were burning out one by one and parts of the Great Hall were plunged into darkness. She sat in deep thought and did not even see the young handmaiden who entered and knelt before her. The girl had to repeat what she said thrice before

the Empress heard her and discovered her presence. 'Your couch is ready, Oh Great Empress.'

'I have no intention of going to bed. Call the guard commander and tell him to bring some of his men to escort me to the Temple of the Black Devil – quickly!'

The girl vanished behind the red drapery of the second door of the hall and Kadesi was once again left alone with only one torch burning. Then suddenly the solitary torch shook as if struck by an unseen hand; it snapped clean off the bracket holding it onto the wall and crashed to the floor with a dull clatter.

Kadesi leapt up, her eyes wild with fear and her heart pounding fiercely. 'An ill omen,' she gasped. 'An evil omen for my beloved empire. But I shall fight to save it – I shall fight.'

Then the guards came clattering into the darkened hall, followed by the two favourite handmaidens of

the Empress. They found Kadesi standing near the door, trying her best to keep the expression of wild fear and horror off her face. 'Let us go,' she said curtly.

Dozens of oil lamps burn inside the Great Temple of the Black Devil Goddess of Darkness. A hideous image of stone towers above the black altar – extending right up to the roof. It leers down at the kneeling priestess from an obscene stone mouth and bulging sightless eyes. This hideous image was never carved by the Strange Ones; nor is it the work of a Black man. Legends say it fell from the skies, and its hideousness would seem to confirm this. The Strange Ones, having found this idol half-buried in the sands of the Ka-Lahari, had brought it into their city and built a temple for it. This idol was said to possess strange powers of evil and to be capable of devouring the soul of a man if it felt thus inclined.*—

The priestesses – there are three – of the Devil Goddess are wearing nothing but brief loincloths and each wears a heavy black mask representing the Devil Goddess. All three wear heavy swords in leather sheaths at their sides and one of them carries a drum made out of the skull of a man with the top sawn off and a skin stretched across the brain cavity. This drum she beats with a short stick, a baby's skull forming the knob at one end. A trussed live calf lies on top of a pile of faggots on the black altar in front of the statue. Immediately behind the statue is a great stone bowl burnt black by countless fires. In this bowl is a pile of wood. Lying bound and helpless on this pile of wood are two captives – girls, both of them. The first of these is a young Black girl wearing the iron collar of a slave; the second is White, with flaming red hair and green eyes, and her enlarged abdomen denotes that she is soon to

be a mother.

The throbbing drums, beaten by slaves hideously painted to represent Evil itself, send a steady rhythm through the macabre vault.

In the courtyard of the Temple, an alien god stands over a small altar to which is tied a loudly protesting dog that seems to have been very well fed indeed. The god is one of the obscene idols the Strange Ones brought with them from their far-off native land. In the porch of the Temple is a cage full of chattering and struggling monkeys. These holy monkeys are going to be used in the ceremony about to commence – and the dog also.

Suddenly a guard puts a horn to his lips and blows a short blast on it. Then he steps aside and the Empress Makira-Kadesi enters the temple courtyard, followed by her servants and gilt-armoured Palace Guards. They stop a few paces from the altar of the animal-headed god and the fat

dog tied to the altar growls viciously. The three priestesses emerge from the temple itself, accompanied by a slave carrying a torch, and they briefly salute Kadesi by silently raising their hands. No talking is allowed near the Temple of Evil.

The First Priestess waves the Empress's retinue away and takes Kadesi by the hand, leading her nearer to the altar of the Dog-god. Then she suddenly draws her sword and slashes the raiment off the tall Empress, flinging the robes onto the pile of wood on the altar of the Dog-god. The Second Priestess reaches down and seizes the dog, unties it and holds it upside down, ignoring its loud protests. The Empress is made to kneel while the dog is held above her – its slavering mouth only a finger's length above her gold-crowned head. With a sudden vicious slash the First Priests cuts the dog's throat and spurting blood deluges the naked Empress.

The Second Priestess flings the dog onto the altar and the slave dips the burning torch into the pile of wood to set it alight. In the grim light both priestesses now perform a silent, though vigorous dance while the Third Priestess seizes the Empress by the wrist and whips her soundly with a long whip she had been carrying.

Makira screams with pain until she falls in a swoon. The First and Third Priestesses now carry her between them into the Temple, while the Second Priestess takes the whip and throws it onto the sacrificial fire, lingering there to ensure that it burns properly. Then she joins the others.

The Empress is left inside the Temple near the door to recover while the three priestesses go behind the great Idol of Evil to light the fire in the bowl in which the two girls are tied hand and foot. The screams of the two victims ring through the

Temple and Makira sits up near the door, her eyes wide with horror and pain. At long last the screams die away and the smell of burning human and dog flesh drifts over the city from the Temple of Evil.

Makira is now dragged forward and made to offer tufts of her hair on the black altar in front of the hideous idol. The First Priestess applies a torch to the pile of wood on which the trussed calf lies and the Empress watches in fascinated horror as the violently struggling animal dies. Then the First Priestess waves Makira and the other two priestesses back and prostrates herself before the black altar, and soon sweat is pouring down her face as she concentrates all her mental power in one telepathic call to the Spirit of Darkness.

For a long time the silent, unspoken call from the kneeling priestess shrieks into the depths of Eternity itself. The priestess has

even stopped breathing as she concentrates her whole being into projecting this mind-message into the depths of Infinity, summoning the very essence of Evil to make an appearance in the Temple.

There is a blinding flash inside the Temple – a flash of sun-bright flame which consumes the kneeling priestess utterly. It is closely followed by a peal of thunder that shakes the city and the surrounding countryside. Then a loud noise like a thousand tempests roars through the city and the shocked night is filled with howls of a million demons as they converge on the Temple of Evil. Inside the Temple Makira hears the mystic strains of the Song of Eternity and sees a dark figure emerge from the roaring flames. Before her stands Watamaraka, the She-Devil, the Goddess of Evil!

* For thousands of years after the fall of the empire of the Strange Ones, the witchdoctors of the Batswana and later the Barotse, searched in vain for this alien idol, and the search is still continuing.

WHEN GRASS MEETS FIRE

A great darkness clouded the Temple of Evil, snuffing out the lamps, torches and altar fires, and the High Empress found herself standing alone in the eerie vault with ghostly, hideous shapes and faces leering at her. She stood facing the tall evil shape of the Devil Goddess Watamaraka – mother of all tokoloshes and demons. Kadesi suddenly felt a terror creeping over her, more than she had ever experienced before. It was one thing to worship the unseen forces; but to come face to face with them was another.

The golden Rebel Goddess suddenly smiled – a hard smile that

sent icy worms crawling up and down the spine of the Empress. Her thin cruel lips twisted contemptuously as she said:

‘You called me, and I am here. What do you want with me?’

‘I want . . .’ the Empress began.

‘Oh stop, you make me sick!’ snarled the Evil Goddess. ‘I know what you want – you want me to save your miserable empire – but are you willing to pay a price for it?’

‘What is the price?’ stammered Makira.

‘The price to save your rotten empire is your own miserable self – your life in exchange,’ said the She-Devil with a mocking smile.

‘I must . . . die,’ stammered Makira aghast. ‘How will my death save the empire, Oh Goddess; tell me – how!’

‘I shall explain, stupid mortal,’ sneered the Evil Goddess. ‘You must give me your body and let me rule your empire, masquerading as you. This means that your soul must

leave your body and go to hell, while I enter and act through it. That is my price – take it or leave it.’

The Empress Kadesi-Makira suddenly felt like an animal in a cruel snare. She realised that Watamaraka had cornered her; there was no way out. Kadesi was very fond of life and everything she had done or planned so far had only one aim: to make her own life as sweet as possible. It is quite true that she wanted to make her empire great and to remove the threat of destruction – but she also wanted to live to enjoy the fruits of it all. The fact is that Makira-Kadesi did not care how many lives were lost in the process of making her empire great and secure – provided those lives belonged to others. Like all rulers and tyrants she was extremely selfish. She swallowed hard and looked pleadingly at the Evil Goddess who smiled back at her maliciously and said: ‘Well?’

‘Can’t we reach . . . a . . . compromise? I mean . . .’ stammered Makira.

‘Oh, be quiet!’ snarled the Goddess. ‘Your selfishness makes me sick.’

‘But surely there must be another alternative . . .’ Makira pleaded.

‘Yes, there is,’ smiled the Goddess evilly. ‘Oh yes, there is! Call one of the priestesses and tell her to go and fetch me any Black female slave from your Palace – quick!’

Some time later a young female slave named Luluma, who had been given as a present to the Empress by her original owner, was hustled roughly into the Temple by one of the two surviving priestesses. The Black girl, her eyes wide with fear, was made to lie down on her back between Makira and the apparition Watamaraka.

‘What . . . ?’ asked Makira.

‘You will find out soon enough – so keep quiet!’ And with these words

Watamaraka lifted her arms above her head and seemed to take a deep breath. Then a blinding flash of light lit up the Temple like the inside of a white-hot furnace, and Makira dropped unconscious. After a while she slowly regained consciousness and opened her eyes. She was surprised to find herself lying flat on her back and even more surprised to see a young tall woman towering over her like a pillar of beauty, wearing the tiara she herself had worn only moments previously.

‘Get up, slave!’ commanded the tall woman shortly.

As Makira rose the terrible truth dawned upon her – and it was a truth so fantastic, she could not bring herself to accept it. She could not believe that the Evil Goddess could actually have done this to her.

The apparition had vanished and Makira slowly realised that the tall woman standing before her was herself – her previous self. Her

present self stood in the body of Luluma. And this to Makira was worse than death. She stood staring at the form that was hers. She saw herself as others saw her – a tall, mature and beautiful woman with a skin a few shades darker than the skin of the Strange Ones, with a strong face, a hard mouth and bright deepset eyes. Through a mist of bitter tears she saw the body she had been so proud of, now tenanted by the Goddess of Evil, Mother of all tokoloshes.

The crowned woman who had been Makira, smiled cruelly and snapped: 'Get up, you blubbering black bitch, and get back to the Palace before I have you whipped.'

'You foul she-devil!' cried Makira-Luluma. 'I shall expose you. I shall ...'

'Remove this slave and have her locked up in the Palace dungeon,' Watamaraka-Kadesi ordered briskly.

The people of the Empire of the

Strange Ones were astonished; never in all their lives had they seen anything like it. Never had they seen a ruler work them so ruthlessly as their new Empress Kadesi.

The empire was suddenly expanding and trade with foreign countries reached unheard-of heights. Tens of thousands of slaves were being exported, together with piles of ivory and gold dust. Wealth flooded the land once more, bringing more settlers to swell the population. Hundreds of slaves toiled and died miserably in the ore-mines and salt pans, while thousands of elephants were butchered. The Strange Ones had a unique way of hunting elephants: they dug deep pits, narrow in cross-section, and often lined with masonry. Inside these pits sat men armed with long spears. Others went out to drive the elephants towards them. As the elephants passed over or near the pits, the hidden

spearman thrust their spears deep into their bellies.

Six months went by during which the Empire of the Strange Ones grew to great heights of glory and splendour, and soon its name became known to other nations. Like a protea it rose from the rocks of obscurity and isolation and it smiled at the sun like a bride in spring.

Then one day the slave woman Makira-Luluma escaped from a troop of slaves working in a plantation and fled into the dark forest.

After eight whole moons I returned to Makarikari – to the cave where Ninavanhū-Ma enlightened me on so many things. I had been wandering throughout the land; I had seen the great Lu-Kongo river where Odu and Amarava begat the first human beings after the destruction of the First People. I even saw where Amarava gave birth to the first Bushmen and Pygmies. Now we

were back at our cave.

‘That was a wonderful journey, beloved Goddess,’ I said with a smile. ‘But you are not looking very happy at all – what can be the matter?’

‘Humanity is in great danger, Lumukanda,’ replied Ma seriously. ‘Something strange happened while we were away and a great evil now walks this land. We must act fast to stop it from overwhelming the rest of the world.’ Then she sat silent for a while, as though listening to something. ‘Someone is coming in this direction. This is where I vanish and I leave everything in your hands.’

For a long time I stood waiting alone in the forest and at last I noticed a movement opposite me. A young girl, a young Black slave girl, came into view. There was an expression of wild fear on her face and she looked as if she was fast nearing the valley of insanity. She kept casting fearful glances over her

shoulder and she did not see me until she was very close. I knew who she was – I remembered her very well; she was *Luluma*, the same girl who had comforted me on that dark morning after I had slain my parent.

‘*Luluma!*’ I said softly, ‘*Luluma*, what brings you here?’

The girl started and her eyes opened wide. With a jerk she jumped back. I had started to develop the ability to read thoughts, and I read terror in her mind – far greater than the terror she felt for whatever she was running from.

‘Do you no longer remember me, *Luluma?*’ I asked gently. ‘Why do you look so afraid? I am no ghost.’

‘You . . . you . . .’ she gasped with infinite horror.

My newly acquired powers of reading human thoughts were not yet extensively developed but I could sense guilt and great shame faintly through the more overpowering cloud of terror. I grasped her by her

thin shoulders and forced her to look up at me. 'Why are you scared of me, little one?'

The girl looked up at my smiling face and suddenly tears flooded her eyes. 'I am not . . . I am not *Luluma* . . . *Luluma* . . . is dead.'

'Nonsense! I know you are *Luluma*. We were slaves together, remember?'

'Let me explain . . .' she stammered.

'If I let you explain you will no doubt tell me you are a blue-eyed impala with a pink tail. Come let us go to my cave and I shall give you something to eat first.'

I took her by the wrist and drew her closer to me. Before she realised what had happened, we were inside my cave. She gasped in amazement. 'How did we get here?'

'On the wings of mental power.'

'Did you have these powers even while you were a slave?'

'No, I had the strange fortune to

be saved from becoming a fish's dinner by a very charming Goddess . . .'

'A . . . a . . . Goddess?' gasped *Luluma*, her face turning more grey with horror.

'Yes, a Goddess, child, one of those things I used to think were only figments of some crazy old man's warped imagination.'

Suddenly *Luluma* leapt to her feet with a flatly squeezed cry of fear and bolted for the entrance of the cave. But she virtually ricocheted off the radiance-shield enshrouding the apparition of *Ma*, who appeared in the entrance of the cave, and landed behind my back, gibbering like a monkey.

'Poor, poor thing, how you must have suffered,' said *Ma*. 'Do you know who this child is, *Lumukanda*?'

'Yes, I know her very well. She was a fellow slave . . .'

'Wrong! This is the High Empress *Makira* – her soul at least, contained

inside the body of the girl *Luluma* whom you knew. *Makira's* real body is inhabited by my arch-enemy, the Goddess of Evil, *Watamaraka*. And unless I act promptly, the human race will go the way of the First People. Come, let us act now!'

In the city of the Strange Ones tension is mounting and rumours are flying like bats in the night. It seems that something totally without precedent had happened in a small fortified village on the northern border of the empire. Thousands of slaves had suddenly exploded into open armed rebellion and had not only destroyed the garrison in the village to the last man, but had massacred their masters and mistresses, and afterwards escaped into the forests beyond the border.

The governor of the north had sent a regiment in pursuit of these slaves, but the regiment had been totally annihilated in an ambush.

The Strange Ones are uneasy; men are carrying swords in the streets and if a slave so much as looks suspicious, they pounce upon him and slay him on the spot. There are differences of opinion; some want the slaves to be accommodated in bulk outside the city; others disagree as they feel the slaves might unite outside and attack the city.

To restore the people's confidence the Empress has ordered a parade of the armed might, and tens of thousands of troops are now marching through the streets, hauling their weird weapons of war. These include catapults for hurling vast stones, and giant bows capable of shooting bundles of spears, like arrows, with one shot. Also on parade is their latest weapon – a light structure drawn by only two oxen. It is also a catapult, but it hurls large bags full of an inflammable oil, and there are long wicks which are set alight before the missile is

hurled. It is said that these murderous machines have been invented by the Empress herself.

The Great Square is crowded with people who have come to watch the demonstration. At the appointed hour a war machine is brought into position on the far side of the square. On the near side two slaves are tied to stakes planted in the ground. Scores of slaves have been herded together in another part of the square to witness the exhibition. There is an expectant silence as the soldiers prepare the machines and the wick on the oilbag is lit. The commander snaps out an order and the catapult fires with a thud. The bag sails through the air with a trail of smoke, and a loud cheer resounds as it hits the two slaves tied to the stakes.

‘There you are, you black vermin!’ shouts one of the soldiers to the crowd of slaves herded in the enclosure. ‘Would you like to rebel

against us?’

‘More . . . more . . . Give us more . . . show these black dogs!’ The crowds roar with delight, while the two slaves writhe in agony in the flames.

From where she stands on her small portable platform the Empress smiles. She gives another curt order to one of her battle leaders, and another machine is brought into position, one that shoots a volley of spears at the same time. This time two female slaves are dragged out amid cheers from the crowds of Strange Ones.

But suddenly there is an interruption!

A tall, black-veiled woman emerges from the crowds and calmly walks into the centre of the square. She raises her arms and her loud voice shatters the silence:

‘Stop! Enough!’

All eyes are fixed on her as she stands there in the centre of the

square. A deeper silence falls upon the crowds and all mouths hang open in sheer astonishment. Then once more the voice rings out with compelling force:

‘You . . . you there, who call yourself the Empress Kadesi . . . hear me! Hear what I have to say to you. You do not belong to this world and you have no right here. You must either stop your atrocious deeds or take the consequences. I am warning you!’

The Empress is being threatened within her Great City. The deep silence lies heavy on the crowds as everybody awaits the reactions of the Empress to this impudence. The Empress suddenly leaps off her platform and comes running towards the tall, veiled figure.

‘You foul bitch . . . I’ll teach you to insult me!’

A chorused howl of pure astonishment bursts from the crowds. The Empress has staggered

backwards as if struck by an unseen hand. She spins head over heels and flops most disgracefully in the dust.

The Empress rises slowly and the watching crowds see her lips move as she asks her black-veiled enemy a question. They strain their ears in vain to hear the earnest conversation now in progress. Then, in utter astonishment they see their Empress, fear now written on her face, slowly turn . . . and walk away. The assembly opens a way for her and she silently passes through, followed by her bodyguard – shocked and undecided – like a pack of dogs with their tails between their legs. The departing party melts away with the crowds and all astonished eyes now turn to the mysterious veiled figure, proudly striding away in another direction.

She comes straight down the narrow street towards where I am standing with the young slave woman *Luluma*, and in a voice charged with

feigned haughtiness she shouts, loudly enough for some passers-by to hear: 'Attend me, you unclean beasts, and let us go!'

Like obedient slaves we follow the veiled woman at a discreet distance, making the hundreds of people who had been following the mysterious figure believe we are nothing but a couple of slaves following their widowed mistress home. Thus we entered the city and now we are returning 'home' somewhere in the poorer quarters of the city.

And now things are happening fast and I can feel in my bones that the 'end' is indeed within sight.

I know that Watamaraka in the guise of the Empress Kadesi is fully aware of the presence within her city of Ninavanhū-Ma, in the guise of a widowed mistress – and soon these mighty giantesses from the depths of Eternity, are going to be locked in a titanic struggle.

LUMUKANDA TURNS TRAITOR!

When we reached the house after successfully dodging the vast crowds that had followed us, we closed and bolted the door. I then turned to our mistress and asked her what she had said to the Empress Watamaraka-Kadesi.

‘Well, when I struck her down with the powers at my disposal, she soon enough realised who I was. I told her I have decided to give her three moons in which to make her exit from this world and return to exile beyond the River Time. She said she would think it over. I now know that there is going to be an open clash between us very soon – and that will be an interesting

battle.'

'What will happen . . . if you lose?' asked the slave girl *Luluma*, whose soul was that of *Makira*.

'If I lose, the whole world and the Universe will disintegrate, and chaos and nothingness will rule supreme.'

Tears flooded the eyes of the young slave girl. 'Goddess, I speak as *Makira*, and I speak in earnest. I have murdered, cheated and tortured, all on behalf of this useless plaything-empire, which I can see will soon be wiped off the face of history. Please, I beg you, do whatever you like – wipe it off, and destroy every human being in it. But do not fail to destroy *Watamaraka*, the Mother of Demons. Destroy her, above all.'

'The coming battle between *Watamaraka* and me will decide the future of creation. But I am very worried indeed, because I can foresee you, *Lumukanda*, turning traitor and betraying me to the force

of evil.'

'What!' I cried. 'Me a traitor?'

Two days after that, news came to the Great City from the south – news that increased the tension within the empire to fever pitch. A great revolt had broken out in the land of the Ba-Tswana nation and vast hordes of slaves and half-white malcontents were razing the imperial towns to the ground and freeing slaves who swelled the ranks of the destruction-mad rebels tremendously. These hordes were being led by a young woman of strange appearance whom many called the Wild Huntress.

This young woman was an albino and she always dyed her hair a bright violet. She claimed to be the daughter of the Evening Star. No one knew who her parents had been but this much was known that she was an albino of the race of the Strange Ones. A deadly archer, she was leading her blood-thirsty hordes

nearer and nearer to the Great City. Destruction pure and simple, and not conquest, was this woman's motive – and she was destroying thoroughly – and utterly.

Then close in the wake of these unpleasant tidings came more news from the north. A slave named Lubo had escaped from the Great City some time ago, it was said, and this slave had succeeded in reaching the northern border of the empire which he crossed and somehow made himself leader of the slaves who had already rebelled and escaped.

Now this Lubo, it was said, was ravaging the northern and eastern provinces and his hordes were also coming nearer and nearer to the Great City, from the east. When news of members of their race being mercilessly butchered by the rebel slaves reached the ears of the citizens of the Great City, they went wild with rage and fear and hatred.

Howling mobs of the Strange Ones roamed the streets, murdering any Black slave they saw. Slaves who had been loyal for as long as they had been alive were beheaded by their very owners; some had their limbs torn from their bodies; some were hurled from the walls into the moat. No mercy was shown to any slave, male, female, young or old.

Within an hour the whole city had become one reeking slaughter pit – bodies of dead slaves strewn everywhere, up and down every street. But some owners hid their slaves in deep cellars, while others smuggled them out of the city. There were those who died or were injured in the process of defending their slaves against the mobs. There were, there are, and always will be, those with feelings for others.

I was asleep when all this started, and even as *Luluma* awoke me, our Goddess had already sprung into action. She was now standing on the

highest tower in the city and projecting her penetrating voice across the length of the city:

‘People from beyond the seas . . . hear me . . . the Guardian Angel of all living things – you included. I command you to stop killing those whom I have placed under my protection. I order you to leave them alone and allow them to leave your cursed city. I warn you – leave them alone, or face my vengeance!’

The shocked city heard . . . and saw . . . the Source of Life! They stood where they were, petrified. And in the minds of all re-echoed the words: ‘. . . your cursed city . . . your cursed . . .’

They knew their city was doomed, even before it was destroyed, and they knew that their race would soon be nothing but the faintest of faint echoes in the grottoes of history.

‘. . . your cursed city . . .’

They watched as thousands of

slaves streamed out of the city and somehow they knew that within the breast of everyone burned a red-hot torch of vengeance. They were lost, they knew it; their death sentence had been passed . . .

So, the people of the last remaining city of the empire stood to arms for the rest of that day, and for the three days following. They did not know that in future there would not be a single member of their descendants who would carry forth their memory; but that instead, a continent full of people would carry forth the memory of those they had enslaved and murdered!

On the fifth day reports came that the armies, or rather hordes, led by Lubo from the east, and the Wild Huntress from the south, were only a day's journey from the city. On that day all the Strange Ones fled to the confines of the city walls, leaving homes and farms behind. No slave,

however loyal, was admitted into the safety of the city and those who had Bushman and Hottentot wives left them to their fate. These wives who had shared couches with the proud Strange Ones were butchered to the last soul by the slave hordes.

Abandoned, the slaves streamed across the plains in their thousands to join Lubo and increase his already over-swollen hordes.

Inside the walls of the Great City much was happening, the most important being the sudden disappearance of the Empress – deserting her people in their hour of peril. The shocked people did not know the truth, of course, the truth of her changed personality. The Mother of Demons had wearied of playing Empress and had simply left the city.

Another interesting happening was that two battle leaders became involved in a duel over the vacated throne, in which the one died

shortly after having killed the other.

A young fifteen-year-old boy, the last descendant of the first Emperor, was crowned in a stirring ceremony in which nearly all the people in the city took part – their last coronation ceremony on earth.

The young boy rose after the formalities were concluded and addressed the cheering crowd, concluding: ‘Let us fight to the very end. If the savages attack us, Oh my people, let us give them something with which to remember us till the end of time. If you must fall, Oh my people, fall as true warriors should – and fall after sending at least ten of the black swine to hell.’

The sun set in a blaze of fiery splendour. It set slowly, as if anxious to prolong the empire’s last day . . .

A voice called softly out of the moon-bathed forest. It called once . . . twice . . . thrice . . . It was a voice of enchantment, a voice of pure seduction. It spoke of longing, a

ravaging hunger such as no human being can ever feel and remain alive. It spoke of a great loneliness, surpassed only by the fury of hell itself. It was the voice of temptation . . . of pure Evil. It said: '*Lumukanda* . . .'

I was sitting outside the cave and inside my beloved Goddess was lost in pleasant repose. The girl *Luluma* was fast asleep at the entrance, comfortably curled up underneath a leopard skin. My inquisitiveness prompted me to explore the origin of the pleasant voice, and I quietly stole down the slope into the forest. The shadows closed over me, obstructing the silver light of the all-seeing moon.

Something kept telling me to go back to those to whom I owed allegiance. But another something told me to proceed and meet the owner of the voice. Briefly I hesitated and actually took a step back. But a pair of hungry arms

reached out and caught me in a tempestuous embrace. It was the embrace of Watamaraka-Kadesi!

I was lost in a sea of pleasure such as no man had ever known on this earth. I felt as though I was flying high among the silver stars. I was like a bird – a lost butterfly among a field of scented flowers in another world, beyond Eternity. I was lost . . . lost like a fly smothering in a pot of honey – unable to fly and just dying slowly in its own delight, like a drunkard drowning in his favourite beer!

Suddenly a soft mournful melody rose like a dark cloud in the silver skies of ecstasy through which I was floating. It was the wailing death-song of millions of stars over a blatantly betrayed Universe. And I, Lumukanda, had betrayed the stars, the earth, mankind, into the hands of Evil!

A wave of horror swept over me – a wave of leaden remorse; I had

condemned the Universe by flirting with destruction. For a few moments of transient joy I had sold all that is holy to Evil itself. I struggled to free myself, but Watamaraka-Kadesi smiled mockingly in my face. 'It is too late to escape now, Oh Lumukanda, I have you in my power. In your height of passion you vowed to do anything for me and now I am holding you to that vow. Go back to the cave and unclasp the Necklace of Life from Ninavanhū-Ma's neck, and also the *mutsha* of Fertility from her hips, and bring them to me. Have I made myself clear?'

'I hear and obey.'

'Now I have Ninavanhū-Ma at my mercy,' laughed Watamaraka.

UNDER THE FLOODS OF TIME

There was a flash brighter than the brightest thing imaginable – a flash of light which filled the cave with its blinding glare and a roar of sound that seemed to shatter every bone in my body. Then silence.

I opened my eyes and found we were no longer inside the cave. We were not even on earth, as far as I could make out, but somewhere . . . somewhere, it seemed, on the very frontiers of dark Eternity. We were on the edge of an incredible cliff – a mighty precipice that stretched down into the deepest reaches of Infinity. It plunged down into the depths of darkness, darker than the darkest darkness imaginable. I

looked around to find the source of an eerie light behind me. Some distance away was a glowing vapour.

Ninavanhū-Ma and Watamaraka had taken their dispute to the all-knowing Great Spirit . . .

I shuddered and turned my face away from the eerie light. I looked down at the woman whose head was resting on my thigh and who seemed unconscious – or dead. I looked down upon the Empress Makira, and something told me her soul had been restored to her body – the body it belonged to. A ghostly shape stood some distance away to my left, looking down sorrowfully at the obviously dead body of Luluma, the slave girl. And I knew somehow that this ghostly shape was the soul of Luluma, weeping over the body it could not again inhabit.

Dawn was breaking in the sky. The dispute between Ninavanhū-Ma and Watamaraka had not been settled and it died like the cooking fires of

yester-year. The Spirits of Good and Evil are destined to stay with Humanity in equal proportions till the River of Time ceases to flow.

The Empress Makira-Kadesi and I buried Luluma and we went out onto a low hill overlooking the Great City of the Strange Ones for which the dawn brought no hope. I knew, without being told, that the hordes of the Wild Huntress were now within striking distance of the city, and Lubo was not far away either.

For a long time I stood looking down on the heavily defended walls of the city where thousands of armed men stood ready to die for their homes. I realised that the two attacking hordes could easily be cut to pieces in no time at all, and I did not like the idea of so many human lives being sacrificed merely to destroy that city. A plan had already come to my mind whereby the city could be taken with as few casualties to the attacking forces as possible.

Then something I had not foreseen happened, just as the sun rose, sending long shadows streaming westwards over the dew-moist grass. I had known that the Wild Huntress was close, but I had not anticipated her being so close.

There came loud cries from the forest to the west of the city and a vast horde burst from the cover of the trees in a savage attack on the city walls. Some of the yelling attackers were carrying great rafts with which to cross the moat while others carried scaling ladders, clearly improvised during the night. They came close enough to send volleys of arrows from countless bows at the defenders of the city crouching on the walls. Even as I watched, the first rafts were launched across the moat, full of shouting and determined men. Raft after raft was launched until there were ten crawling up to the stockades. It was then that the

defenders struck – quickly and pitilessly.

With devastating suddenness the mighty throwing machines on the stockades cut loose with a hail of stones the size of human beings, and these were joined by the giant bows and firebag catapults. The whole magic power of the war machines of the Strange Ones was concentrated on the ten rafts. Four were shattered by direct hits and soon the moat was turned into a pitiful emulsion of dying humanity.

Loud cheers of victory rang out from the walls and I was sure I heard across the long distance challenging sounds from the Strange Ones – inviting them to try again. The challenge was not accepted. In a mass wound-licking move they withdrew into the forest.

I stood there watching as the defenders shouted and danced in wild jubilation on the walls. I was determined to go down there in

person and spoil their amusement. That city was an excrescence which interfered with the history of my people, and it was contrary to the laws of the Great Spirit who laid down that each race of humans should be left alone to find its own destiny without outside interference.

I descended the hill, determined to seek out the Wild Huntress, whoever she might be, and offer her my services. Soon I stood at the edge of the forest and it occurred to me that I now had powers which I might as well use. I simply wished myself to be within the presence of the Wild Huntress, wherever she might find herself.

For a moment my vision blurred and as my surroundings came into focus again I found myself standing waist deep in water, directly behind a long-haired young woman who was being bathed by two former female slaves. One of the latter saw

me and let out a loud shriek of fear and there was a series of loud splashes as the women tried to escape into deeper water.

‘He came out of empty air!’ cried one. ‘It is an evil spirit of some sort.’

Standing chest deep in water now, the three women regarded me with wide eyes for a few moments, then the wide-shouldered alien albino in the centre opened her mouth and found a voice:

‘Who are you? Get away from here – get away, you ugly devil!’

I put a fierce snarl on my face and opened my eyes very wide as I took a few steps closer to the women. ‘I haven’t had breakfast yet; little women are my favourite dish!’

‘You wouldn’t dare!’ cried the pink-skinned one. ‘You just try eating me and I’ll . . . I’ll . . .’

‘You will what?’ I asked with a smile.

‘I’ll kill you!’

‘Blood-thirsty this time of the

morning, aren't you?' I remarked as I slowly moved closer.

The girl's eyes blazed in a sudden burst of cold rage, and her nostrils dilated, hissing with short breath. She squeezed a flood of words from between clenched teeth:

'No, you black demon, I do not like killing people . . . only a certain kind – my own kind. These I kill without compunction and I also raze their cities to the ground so properly that no-one will ever know they had ever been there. I leave their carcasses to rot where they fall. I torture some before I kill them . . . Do you know why?'

'Yes, because you seem to be well out of your mind.'

'You insufferable devil! You black son of a . . . lame goat and a . . . a dead hippopotamus! Why you . . .'

'Now, now, now,' I admonished sweetly. 'Let us first get our facts straight. A lame goat cannot mate with a dead hippopotamus . . .'

‘Why . . . you . . . why . . .’

‘Because the goat’s back is lame and the hippo is . . . well . . . dead!’

‘Be silent you!’ She bared her teeth in savage rage. ‘Do you know who I am? Or rather, do you know whose daughter I am?’

‘I hope not the product of a similar combination such as you suggested for me.’

‘I am the daughter of the Empress Makira . . . and one of the battle leaders of her army.’

‘And does that entitle you to damage her property?’

The girl composed herself and looked down into the water. ‘She . . . she is a swine! I have vowed that I will kill her with my own hand. I am going to make her whine for mercy before I kill her. When she was still an unknown half-caste harlot, she seduced my father and made him join forces with her to overthrow the Emperor Karesu. When they discovered I was an albino they both

disowned me and left me in the forest for wild animals to devour. But a roving band of Bushmen found me . . . and brought me up. Now I am back . . . for revenge.'

'And I have come to help you, though my motive is somewhat different. I am going to show you a way of taking that city with the loss of as few lives as possible.'

'Oh, but I do not care how many lives it will take – my own included – but that city must be wrecked!'

'Calm yourself child, calm yourself. Get out of the water and summon your warriors. We have a lot to do.'

For the rest of that day thousands of men took turns at, what was for them, a most puzzling task. From where they were encamped, the forest crept along the lake front to quite close to the city. From a point closest to the city, but still under cover of the thick bush, they began to dig a large hole in the soft earth.

We made the hole, and afterwards the tunnel, big enough to accommodate many workers at the same time. Scores of slave-blacksmiths worked unceasingly forging heavy hoes for digging and axes for cutting supports for the sides and roof of the tunnel. A mound of earth grew higher and higher as long lines of men emptied great baskets full of earth from the tunnel. It had to be dug deep enough to allow safe passage underneath the moat and the foundation of the wall. Deeper and deeper went the tunnel under the expert hands of those who had worked in the mines of the Strange Ones, and at sunset it was more than three-quarters of the way across to the unsuspecting city.

The motley 'armies' of the Wild Huntress were so carried away by what they were doing that they continued the work throughout the night. The idea of tunnelling under the very feet of the city's defenders

and emerging behind them provided the toiling men with many a foul joke as the night wore on. Many were the speculations about how surprised the Strange Ones would be when they saw us emerge in their midst like harvester ants. At daybreak my old friend, now Chief Lubo, arrived with his fresh hordes – about a hundred thousand, counting fighting men only. Lubo provided us with fresh workers and other teams were formed to make ladders and rafts for the frontal attack above ground which had to start the moment a breakthrough was achieved with the tunnel to distract attention.

There were about two thousand Bushmen in the Wild Huntress's hordes and these I organised into a separate battalion of light archers and briefed them on spearheading the tunnel attack, which I would lead personally.

Lubo had also brought a hundred

dugout canoes with which he had intended to attack the city from its weakest side – that facing on Lake Makarikari. We decided to carry out this plan as a further means of distracting attention from the tunnel breakthrough.

At last the headman in charge of tunnelling came back to report that they had broken surface and that they were fortunate enough to emerge within a garden well enclosed within a high mud wall. I ordered the men to rest while I traversed the long tunnel for an inspection. I emerged in a city whose streets were as quiet as a graveyard – into which we turned it pretty soon. By a strange twist of fate the tunnel had emerged in the garden of the house of my erstwhile owner. Now the great house stood empty because all the occupants, women and children, had taken refuge in the strong fort in the centre of the city while every able-bodied man and

boy was manning the walls. I returned and ordered the Bushmen *impi* into the tunnel. They poured into the tunnel like so many ants and were closely followed by three-quarters of Lubo's and half of the Wild Huntress's savages.

Before the Strange Ones became wise as to what was happening, thirty thousand fighting men had emerged within the city and had infiltrated through the empty houses and had already effectively surrounded the fort in the centre, completely cutting it off from those manning the walls. Night had already fallen and only the stars came out to grace a sullen and moonless sky. I looked up at them and said quietly: 'This night you shall see the end of a proud empire, of proud men, who in their insolence and greed never dreamt that such a fate could strike them. They thought they had their tyrant feet securely planted – but they could

not control or rule the River Time, which swallows the proudest empires and over whose rapids now cascades the Canoe of Eternal Death, carrying with it the empire of the Strange Ones to the seas of Oblivion.'

Lubo was saying to his battle leaders: 'Men, remember what you owe these creatures – not long ago you whined under their lash. They denied you the simple right of choosing your mates; they bred you like beasts, and they bought and sold you like beasts. The souls of those they have murdered are even now wandering aimlessly and weeping incessantly in the Spirit Land. Only one thing will pacify them: the death of the very last member of the creatures in this city. Strike, and show no mercy!'

In the meantime the sham frontal attack was being mounted and the Wild Huntress was leading the fleet of war canoes over the quiet, dark

surface of the lake. Then we heard the savage roar from thousands of throats as the frontal attack was launched. We heard the distant thuds of the alien war machines on the walls as a hail of large stones hurtled out and the trails of burning fire-bags traced arcs through the night sky, rising and vanishing like comets beyond the walls. A wall of fire in the background lighted the skies.

I pointed to the dark fort in the centre of the city. 'Go, Lubo, seize that fort and spare nobody. The rest of you follow me!'

The entire Bushman *impi* followed me towards the weakly defended lake front wall. We ran through the silent streets, past trading houses, gardens and small temples, and a house of evil entertainment with alien statues of mating men and women decorating the steps. There was a long agonizing cry from the wall towards which we were

running and an armoured body crashed from the top of the wall. The Wild Huntress's attack had begun and scores of figures running about in confusion were faintly silhouetted against the star-jewelled sky.

A little while later a group of dark figures came walking towards us and we were issued with a haughty challenge. It was the voice of the Wild Huntress herself. I laughed and told her to come closer.

‘It was easy,’ she said tersely. ‘They had only a few men on the wall and only one stone-throwing machine, which sank two of our canoes. But the wall is in our hands. What do we do next?’

‘Have all your men disembarked from their canoes already?’

‘Long ago,’ was her curt reply. ‘We are all inside the city.’

‘Then call them all together and follow me to the fort in the centre of the city – quickly.’

When we came to the fort we found that a fierce battle was still in progress between Lubo's warriors and the gilt-armoured Palace Guards, now commanded by the boy king of the Strange Ones. It seemed as if the Strange Ones had not only brought their women and children and very old men into the fort, but also their boy Emperor with his strong bodyguard. These heavily armoured guards were now standing shoulder to shoulder just inside the fallen gate, forming a solid wall of bronze shields, from behind which they inflicted heavy casualties among Lubo's impi.

A huge stone idol stood on an ornate pedestal not far away from the gate, and to this I made my way through the swarming hordes of attacking warriors. I picked the statue off its pedestal and charged with it into the solid phalanx of guardsmen defending the gate. Three guardsmen went down and

through the gap thus formed tore the Wild Huntress, Lubo and their followers, their swords hacking the confused guards down before they could re-form. Their heavy armour put them at a great disadvantage compared with the light-footed, more mobile attackers.

The guards died to the last man, but even as they died they took many of their former slaves with them. The howling hordes of Bushmen and Bantu roared into the main gate of the round, triple-walled fort and loud shrieks crashed against the star-sprayed skies as hundreds of women and children of the Strange Ones saw their death bursting in on them in a very real form. A troop of women, armed with bows and arrows, briefly delayed the attackers at the second gate. But these were promptly cut down by a hail of Bushmen arrows – however, not before one of them had sent a shaft into the belly of the Wild Huntress.

She fell with a loud scream – of anger, rather than pain.

‘Forward! Forward!’ Lubo encouraged his men.

Then happened something that was both beautiful and pathetic – pathetic and most unusual – and something I knew would live for ever in song and story for as long as the Land of the Tribes still felt the ocean breakers roaring against its shores – for as long as the sacred symbol of the Story-tellers of the Tribes, the mamba with a flower in its mouth, was carried to the Holy Place on the nights of story-telling:

The young boy Emperor stood alone in the innermost gate of the triple-walled fort. He stood there, wearing a white loincloth and a bronze corselet that was too big and far too heavy for him. A heavy bronze helmet covered his whole head and his long jet-black hair tumbled from below it in heavy streams on to his shoulders. In the

flickering light of the two torches burning on brackets on either gatepost we could see through the gap in his helmet that his great dark eyes were wide with fear and tears were running down his pale cheeks. But there was a firmness about his quivering mouth which was both comical and impressive. He was holding a short sword in his hands – a sword that any man would have wielded in one hand only – and his legs seemed to be doing their best to stand firm and straight, while they yearned to turn and start running away from under the brave child.

‘No! No!’ he screamed to the approaching warriors. ‘You go back, you dirty savages – you lowdown slaves . . . you! Go, go baaaaack!’

The howling warriors closed in on him and the boy’s sword flashed in the dim light of the torches as he fought fiercely like the brave young lion he was. A careless warrior fell with a loud cry, and another . . . and

yet another. Although he was completely surrounded and being stabbed and struck at from all sides, the young Strange One fought on and on. He was bleeding heavily and clearly becoming weaker. Then, with a last heart-rending, loud appeal to his long-dead mother to save him, he fell and was cruelly trampled underfoot by Lubo's frontmost attackers. And even as he was trampled down his soul went and joined his mother's.

The fierce hordes swarmed over him into the very interior of the fort and soon loud screams of agony and shrieks of fear told the shocked night that when a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing properly. There was killing going on – by men whom years, and a lifetime of suffering and humiliation, had tortured into beasts that knew no pity. Afterwards I saw blood-crazy warriors doing a victory dance with the long-haired heads of women

impaled on the points of their spears. As I walked through the sickening carnage I recalled an old saying which the old man Obu had once quoted to me when I was still a slave: 'For every act of evil people commit there always will be, some day, punishment in equal measure.'

Some of the warriors were already plundering the dead and had not Lubo reminded them angrily that the city was still far from taken, the warriors would have been caught unawares by the main army which had been manning the walls. These troops had heard the cries and clamour coming from the fort in which were their women and children and hastened along to investigate. As they came charging down the streets they ran into cloud after cloud of poisonous Bushmen arrows. The Bushmen were holding them at bay while the hordes of Lubo and the Wild Huntress crept around behind them to cut off their retreat

and split them off from further assistance that might come from the walls.

This was the fiercest battle and the Strange Ones fought bitterly. They fought till the last man fell in the streets of the city in which they had been lords and masters for so long.

Not all of them died bravely, however. Some died like screaming cowards, having thrown away their weapons and gone running through the streets like warthogs gone mad. Some died begging for mercy – from the men whom they had enslaved. Others died in the act of looting the houses of their fellows. The fat chief Battle Leader of the Strange Ones was captured while trying to sneak out of the city with a chest full of the dead boy Emperor's royal jewels. I ordered him to be taken to the forest and kept alive there, together with his two concubines, for a certain delicious reason I had in mind.

The Wild Huntress was dead, as

was Chief Obu, who had been struck accidentally by a stray Bushman arrow, while leading the attack on the last survivors, who had barricaded themselves inside the Temple of Evil. These were a group of the poets and philosophers of their race and they all committed suicide just as Obu's warriors broke the barricades. One old madman had even extended a blessing over the attacking warriors before plunging a dagger into his own heart.

Dawn broke in the skies and the all-seeing Lord of Day emerged and saw. Lo! By the mighty lake of Makarikari, which in later years was to become nothing but a desolate salt pan – a city of the dead. A city which already belonged to the past, and which was now destined to survive as a mere legend in the minds of the children of those who destroyed it.

For three whole days tens of thousands of Bantu, Bushmen and half-castes laboured in the great city,

razing houses to the ground and scattering the stones all over the countryside. The towers and temples disappeared to the lowermost reaches of their foundations. Many ornamental articles, utensils and weapons somehow became spared as trophies and heirlooms, but the bulk of whatever was not breakable, like armour, metal vessels and bronze statuary, was taken into the forest and melted down. Lubo had sworn an oath that if he succeeded in taking the city he would destroy it so thoroughly that not the faintest trace would be left.

On the fourth day the task of merciless destruction was completed, and all that could still be seen was the great oblong clearing of the Great Square, some traces of the streets, and some foundations of private homes. Even these traces were destined to disappear at the hands of wind and weather, and all that remained which could betray

the site was the mass of shaped stones widely scattered in the vicinity.

Then we proceeded with great celebrations in the forest. In the course of these celebrations the high Battle Leader of the Strange Ones and his two concubines – the three very last survivors – were brought in and prepared for the pot. They tasted considerably better than they looked, and they looked much less insolent and brave as they were passed around on our meat trays and stew bowls.

It was during the wild dancing and the loud singing and shouting by all the freedom-drunk people that the High Chief Lubo raised his hands for silence. After the crowds had quietened down and gathered in closer, Lubo raised his fierce voice to the heavens:

‘My people . . . this is for us a day of great joy and jubilation. Today we have come out of the evil hut of

slavery and its door has closed behind us for ever. Today we have crossed the river of blood and tears and beyond we now see the dawn of our smiling future. Today we must mould ourselves into a mighty nation which no aliens would ever dare to enslave again. Let us mould ourselves into a nation of Strength, Beauty, Plenty and Prosperity. Let us call ourselves the Lu-Anda – “they that increase”.’

People leapt up and, delirious with joy, they danced, sang and cried loudly: ‘Lunda! Luaaaaanda! Luanda! . . . Lunda!’

On that day was founded the mighty Lu-Nda nation which, together with the Ba-Kongo, was in later years to rule vast tracts of land from the shores of the Western Ocean to where the land of Ka-Tanga is today.

I placed a solemn blessing on the Lunda people, inspired by the Goddess Ninavanhū-Ma, and I encouraged them to spread like the

sweet luwande flowers and to bring joy and happiness to all – something they had not known for so long.

But on the Lunda people Watamaraka also placed her kind of blessing. She instilled in them a patient vengeful spirit and blatant ferocity, especially in battle. Even today the Lunda are among the fiercest warriors and the most vengeful people under the sun.

A month after all this I had a remarkable vision as I walked through the forest. I saw a strange tree, most unlike any I had ever seen, and whose girth was incredible. It was not growing in the ground like other trees, but walked about on its roots like a spider, or a crab. And it spoke to me: 'I am the Tree of Life who brought living things to this earth and I am the husband of both Ninavanhū-Ma and Watamaraka. You have interfered with both my wives, and for that I curse you and condemn you to Eternal Blindness, and in future you will be known as the Blind War-god Lumukanda.

THE BLOT OF ZIMAMBWE

My children, I have come to tell you something that you must know . . . I am Lumukanda, the story-teller. For this I am going to ask you to give me all your patience and with this I am going to ask you to give me the brains with which you think and the ears with which you hear. And above all, I am going to ask everyone of you to repeat everything as you heard it. No word must be deleted . . . no word must be added. For this is the story which even our wisest of the wise, the witchdoctors, are afraid to

tell. This is the story of shame – the story of how the whole Bantu race was nearly snapped like a twig. This is the story of which according to the strict laws of the Tribes must only be told to those people who are to rise and become Story-tellers. This is the story that must be remembered and yet be forgotten at the same time. And this is the story when every tribe and every nation that we find today in the lands of the Tribes – the lands of the Bantu, had its birth.

After we stoned the city of the Strange Ones, a hundred generations went by. It could be that even I, as an immortal, cannot keep touch with all the generations of Man.

Thus there are always those people who would like to revive the evil things and they usually do this only for their own end. And such a man was that of *Munumutaba* – which means ‘Man of the Big Mountains’.

This man was a rascal from the

very start. He was a rogue and he was a great breaker of the laws of his tribe. He was a bandit and he was a criminal. One day he heard from the lips of a very old man – he heard the story of the coming of the Strange Ones, and the way in which they met their fate, and the evil which they caused in this country. And he heard also how they – the red-headed Ma-Iti, of so many generations ago, gave us the ways of melting the hard iron stone into the spears and axes with which we face enemies in battle. This man, Munumutaba, decided that he himself would revive the empire of the Strange Ones, but as the ruler himself; because always, as you know, my children, it is the bad men who always try to lift themselves up and ruin the lives of men. Now, Munumutaba heard the story of this old man and he decided that he must gather all his fellow-bandits – all his fellow-criminals – and take them to the place to the

west where the mighty lake Makari-Kari has got its shores – its salty shores. This young man gathered in that ugly place of bush and grass and there the bandit began to see the task that lay in front of him. He knew that he could not himself take all these ruined – all these old stones to the far away land of the Mashona. Then he looked about and he and his gang of criminals raided the villages of the humble and gentle Batswana and pressed them into his service. What he did was to build sleds – the kind of which the tribes had never seen before. They were big – big enough to accommodate a hundred people. And these sleds were each drawn by about fifty oxen in one row. What he did then was to collect all the old stones that he found, to stack them in great piles and to load them onto these fantastic sleds of his and so for many years – five whole summers – a strange procession was seen in the land of the Tribes – a

procession the kind of which has never been seen since: great sleds loaded with stones being hauled by men and oxen. Hundreds of men died – hundreds of sweating, suffering men – and thousands of beasts died. But an evil man is never deterred by anything and to him death and suffering was but a game. And in the tenth year of this the great bandit began laying the foundation of the fortress that was for years to become a blot and a mark of shame on most of our tribes.

From the great koppies around that place he also cut stones that were copies of the ones he had got, and with these stones he added further to the strength of this fantastic fortress he was building. And then one day he – Munumutaba of the Mountains – was the confirmed ruler of the land.

You must remember, my children, that he had moved hundreds of sleds

to take these stones all there, and he went nearly mad with this strange task of his because he wanted to make himself a great king. It was said that ever since his childhood he had always worked to be the one man on top. He always worked to be the ruler of all the boys who herded the cattle. But in the end an evil man never does change and so one day, when his chest was swelling with pride and cruel vanity, he stood on the highest tower, known as The Eye of Zima-Mbje – and he looked out over the distant plains and he looked moreover upon the great village that surrounded the mighty fortress. He looked at the ranging krantzes beyond. He saw them and he knew . . . ‘I am the king.’

But it was not designed by the gods that it should be, because as he came down from the mighty fortress something slipped – and one stone slid away out of place, causing a lot of them to slide apart, and he fell

like a bird among all the ruins of falling stone and so the great Munumutaba met his end.

But when one evil weed rises in the field and the law of justice cuts it down, another weed rises. And his son rose again and it was his son who caused this evil of which I am going to tell you now.

You remember, my children, that at this time the land was suffering from a strange scourge. A race of men, the kind of which the tribes had never seen before, was ravaging like lions throughout the land. Even today we have not seen anybody of that description. We must carry today a description of these people so that when you do see them you must know them for what they are – Feared Ones!

These Feared Ones are a race of thin men, but under that thinness lies a great strength. They have noses like the beaks of vultures and hair that grows long – but not as

long as that of the Strange Ones. They had the habit of taking hundreds of our sons and daughters into a land that we must never, never know anything about – and to a land we must never try to know anything about. We never knew whether they were eating those children – whether they were devouring them by their thousands – but this much we do know, that they took them away and we never saw them again.

Munumutaba the Second decided that the best way for him to secure his empire was to come to terms with these Feared Ones – these men like the swift-footed animals, who were like zebras and yet had no stripes. This is what he did.

A band of these men had come to Zima-Mbje and showered him with praises in a foreign language. They called him a great king. They praised his sons and his daughters and his warriors, but wanted to take them to

a faraway country . . . their own country.

Munumutaba said: 'Look, look, my friends, I can give you all the slaves that you want – only this – give me your weapons. Give me the way of making iron hard.' And from these so-called Feared Ones – these Arabi as we call them – we learnt the way of making steel very hard.

Now, Munumutaba attacked other tribes, just as the Strange Ones had done before him – thousands and thousands of generations before him – and he took other tribes into slavery. You could see them – women and children being carried away to a land we know nothing about. He captured the women of the Batswana tribe. He captured the women of the outlying tribes of the Lunda; he sent raiding parties as far up as the land of the Lukundi. And he also sent raiding parties as far up as the land of the Mambo and the land of the Bakwana.

Now, children, listen very carefully. This is what happened. He took these women while he sent the men away into slavery and he had the men and these women led into the land which is today known as the Transvaal. Here the women were sent on their hands and knees to scoop up soil in a certain river known as the river of crocodiles. This river used to carry great quantities of sand and in this sand were tiny grains of the metal which was very dear to the Feared Ones – just as it had been very dear to the Strange Ones before them.

These women used to seek for days on end, sorting out these things just as your mothers sort out the beans from the husks – just as your mothers sort out the chaff out of the mealies. In those days, my children, those were the days which are known as the dark days of our tribes.

These women used to work for days on end sorting out this gold (as

it is called today) and they used to fill it painstakingly into horns and even into large ivory tusks. This gold was taken away to the land of the Arabi by these Feared Ones. What happened to it we don't know; but this much we know – you cannot make a spear out of gold – it is far too soft. So, my children, leave that cursed metal alone.

In those days, my children, many visitors from beyond the seas used to come to our shores looking for this metal – looking also for the teeth of the great elephant which we regard as sacred.

Munumutaba was a man like his own evil father who knew no law. He broke the law by killing elephants without permission from the gods. He broke the law by killing the sacred spotted ones and these he gave to the Feared Ones together with hundreds of slaves. He sent hundreds of young men to toil in the Sacred Iron Mountain of the west –

known as Thaba-Nzimbi, and here he mined the steel. He mined the iron which was made into spears – the famous spears of Zima-Mbje – which were the dread of all our tribes in those days.

My children, those days, as I have said, are days that you must never remember – days that you must never defile the ears of the young by telling. This story I tell now is not to be heard by the ears of children, only by those who want to rise and become great medicine men – and who must be the Guardians of our Tribal History.

What happened in those days, my children, was terrible. Many tribes died. As I have said, Munumutaba attacked hundreds of tribes and he destroyed many. Destroyed was the sacred tribe of the Bakenje, who were the first Bantu people to teach us to carve vessels out of wood. Destroyed was the tribe of the Haini – Haini, who were known for their

music, for their games and for their great sport of wrestling. All these were part of the Batswana tribe.

Then in the north he destroyed, or partly annihilated, the tribe of the Mambo. The members of these tribes were scattered throughout the country as a result of the evil of *Munumutaba*.

Now, my children, an evil thing never does last long. It so happened that one day *Munumutaba* decided to marry. But the woman whom he married, and made his first queen, was a cruel and ambitious woman – as cruel as he was himself. And, my children, this woman destroyed him. She fell in love with one of these Feared Ones – one of these cruel strangers from beyond the seas. She started packing *Munumutaba*'s sacred seraglio with women of the Lawu, the despised Lawu people, whom you know as the Hottentots – the people whom we hate worse than the plague and the

people whom we are proud to have wiped off from the face of the earth – the Lawu Hottentots.

These Lawu were a cold and arrogant people. They thought they were next only in kinship to the Arabi and so this gang of people, the Arabi and Munumutaba's wife and the Lawu, began yet another reign of terror in the land which was worse than the first one which Munumutaba had begun.

One day while Munumutaba lay resting on his fat side his wife crept into the room and drove a spear into his heart – and so he died. And she ruled that country – and she ruled it with a hand of evil.

The trade with the Feared Ones grew and so the land of Zima-Mbje prospered at the expense of hundreds of tribes. But in the end, after generations and generations of people had come and gone, after Munumutaba's wife herself had met her death at the hands of – at the

teeth of – a crocodile, things began to change.

My children, you cannot keep on storing up the wrath of a river without that river sweeping you along. I told you before, my children, that Munumutaba had displaced hundreds of people. He had scattered hundreds of tribes, and these tribes were cut off from their tribal laws and they became merely roamers in the forest. Some of them found their way into the land which we today know as Swaziland. And those – those days when those people had come – those sorry remnants of people had come – from tribes once great, they lost all their ways of making, building even humble huts for themselves. They took to dwelling in the trees. Also the famous Venda – they broke away at this time. They were formed out of hundreds of slaves who sought refuge in the mountains of the east, which are known as the

Drakensberg today.

O, my children, those days were days of change and turmoil. Those days were days when one tribe went down into oblivion and another rose like an eagle into the sky.

In those days, my children, the great nation known as the Nguni (which means 'the people who lack country') who had no land, the people Nguni, were formed. The Nguni was formed out of myriads of tribes and even today their language contains hundreds of words that were taken over from these tribes. And, my children, a people that rises out of the ground – out of the charred remnants of destroyed tribes – these people are remarkable for their great ferocity, and the Nguni was a ferocious and cruel race.

And as you know, my children, they had to fight in order to be there – in order to exist. It so happened that when Munumutaba the Fifth,

who was known as the Thief and who was partly an Arabi and also partly a Hottentot, took the throne of the great empire of Luvijiti (as they were insolent enough to call it), the great Nguni tribes began to hammer at the gates of this empire. In one mighty battle they threw back the degenerate scum, who belonged to no particular race or tribe, in whose veins flowed the blood of the Arabi and in whose veins flowed the blood of the Hottentots, and in whose veins also flowed the blood of the Bantu. They scattered it like chaff before the great wind.

The Nguni even today still date their history from this great battle when they crushed the poor, but well-armed, forces of Munumutaba the Fifth to the ground. And the poor rascal, as his forefathers had done before him, tried to make a stand and to show them what a brave man he was. But a stone from

the great Eye fell down and crushed him to the earth. So died *Munumutaba* the Fifth.

My children, you will notice that this story I tell with a great reluctance – because it is a story that must never be told. It is a story that we must only tell you children so that you must know – and you must learn never – never ever, to allow anything like Zima-Mbje to rise again amongst you. You must never again have that glittering splendour, have that great lawlessness and lewdness, and you must never practise that strange and evil immorality that was committed in that evil place.

Zima-Mbje is a place that we must forget and if you ever pass that ugly and forbidden structure you must close your right eye and look at it only with your left – and curse it! Because there, in Zima-Mbje, is the shame of your fathers – the shame of the tribes. Zima-Mbje is a guilty

place, and its name, its original name of Luvijiti, must always be mentioned with a curse. It must always be spat upon and which is why I ask you to know it by this name: Zima-Mbje – ‘structure of stone’.

This great structure afterwards became a lair of criminals and bands of feared ones – the Arabi – who also came after the fall of Zima-Mbje.

Sometimes one or two tribes would dwell in that place for a few generations. But always the curse we put so many years ago upon the very structure – the very presence of Zima-Mbje only – drove these people away who lived there. Some used to find hiding places in other fortresses that Munumutaba and the Feared Ones had built before in the Inyanga, and also other places. But always the curse of our tribes drove these people out of there in the course of time.

My children, whenever you go

near that hated place you must remember that in that place lies the great shame of the tribes. Never again must a thing like Zima-Mbje be allowed to rise in the land, because it is the thing that nearly brought upon us – the people of the Bantu – the doom of the First People. It nearly caused the wrath of the gods to fall upon us – so bad, so immoral, were the things that were done in that place.

And so, my children, in the course of time the Lawu, the Hottentots, were driven far down to the south and there in the end they became a lost people. I think they were being punished for what they had helped in founding in that land of the Mashona.

My children, Zima-Mbje was a very strong fortress. The stories that I could tell you of how it was stoned – the acts of courage that chief after raiding chief performed to bring that fortress to its knees – are too

many for me to tell you now. There were times when heads of oxen were used to batter down the gates. And attempts were even made to undermine the walls. So strong was the fortress even in those days.

My children, I would rather dwell inside the humblest hut – in a hut where the dome is so small there is hardly any room for smoke – than dwell in the splendour that was once Zima-Mbje. In the reign of Munumutaba the Second, and especially his son – his wife's son who was half Arabi and half a Tswana – the Straight Munumutaba – those were days of splendour. Even today, maybe, you might find traces of those days . . . forget them. Destroy them wherever you see them! Such is the message I leave you.

THE EYE IS BLIND THAT WILL NOT SEE

My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen of Science, especially those who are doing research into the past of Africa, may I humbly appeal to all of you for one thing which is of the greatest importance in these days when the world is changing as rapidly as a frightened chameleon – while new things once thought impossible are daily becoming part of the great reality. May I lodge with you a plea which I have sworn to continue urging until someone listens. I appeal for nothing big,

dramatic or drastic; I only appeal for simple flexibility, and a willingness to hear and judge clearly without prejudice.

There is nothing more saddening than a man deliberately blinding himself to the shimmering lake of reality. There is nothing more pathetic than the sight of a man who, on beholding a frowning mountain in the purple distance yonder, still insists that the mountain is not there – a man who, though standing knee-deep in a roaring river, still insists with stubborn conviction that he is standing on a sand dune in the Ka-Lahari.

My Lords, a rigid inflexibility in one's beliefs is harmful, not only to the individual holding such views, but to the whole nation or race to which he belongs. Such a stubborn refusal to bend preconceived ideas caused the men of the Inquisition in Italy to persecute Galileo and to

burn elsewhere at the stake hundreds of men whose only offence was that they entertained ideas which clashed with those of their lords and masters of the Church. It was this stubborn resistance to the voice of new ideas that caused the ancient Bantu to kill men and women who dared invent things that could have made their lives less rigorous.

This same inflexibility is very evident today and nowhere is it more blatantly displayed than in that field of research dealing with Africa's past.

Many years ago White men came upon a number of interesting things while exploring Africa. They discovered paintings done in 'prehistoric' times by the Aborigines of Africa, and they promptly designated them as 'Bushman paintings'. These paintings were copied and classified on the basis of wild guesswork; few were those who

made a sincere, open-minded and scientific enquiry into what these paintings portray.

Another thing that claimed the attention of scientists was the old stone ruins one finds scattered across Southern Africa. Soon the sound of picks and spades was heard, wielded by, or under the supervision of, archaeologists. Ruins, commonly known as of the 'Zimbabwe' type, were despoiled of their treasures and museums were filled with vessels, artifacts and ornaments, and even today these serve to illustrate the widest variety of hypotheses, not one of which comes near the truth. Yet in these very ornaments and numerous characters and symbols of Bantu and Hottentot writing the true story of 'Zimbabwe' is written for all to read – for all those who can read.

But rather than do this, the great scientists preoccupied themselves with forming strange theories about

these ruins. Not only were these theories strange, but fantastically far-fetched, like those in which King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are featured.

The tragedy is that each scientist is inclined to cling stubbornly to his own self-concocted theory.

Many decades ago a significant discovery was made by an explorer named Mack, an engineer of merit. He was exploring the mountains known as the Brandberg in South-West Africa and here he discovered some rock paintings to which he found himself drawn like a rusty spearhead to a lump of magnetite. The most remarkable of these paintings shows a figure which at first glance looks like a woman of Semitic or Caucasian origin – in short, a White woman. The engineer Mack made a rather inaccurate sketch of what he had seen and this was soon featured on the front pages of newspapers.

This news drew the attention of a great White scientist, who dedicated himself to the unravelling of the past of my fatherland. The Abbé Breuil decided to go and see the painting himself and he, too, made a copy of what he promptly called 'The White Lady of the Brandberg'.

As is usual with all great scientific discoveries and interpretations, the great Abbé Breuil found himself savagely criticised, mainly by critics of the padded armchair type, who found it easier to attack brave men and call them liars than to sweat out a trip to the Brandberg.

There were those who shamelessly accused the Abbé Breuil of having 'touched up' the face of the White Lady, to make an ordinary Bushman look like a White woman. Others emphatically concluded that the White Lady is not white, but a ceremonially decorated Musutu woman.

The dispute, dormant for so many

years, recently flared up again, sparked off by an exhibition of African art in the Johannesburg Art Gallery. Now new versions have emerged: the White Lady is not a lady, but a gentleman. They say 'she' is a Hottentot man, white-daubed for a dance. Others say 'she' is a Bushman out on a hunt. One of Johannesburg's morning newspapers even went so far as to run a 'pick out the mistakes' competition (no prizes awarded) by publishing various copies of the painting – those of Mack, Breuil and others.

This long train of childish arguments by people who refuse to face facts has gone far enough, and it is now my duty to enter into this dispute. For far too long a time has the White man done things, written and drawn conclusions about things without bothering to hear our accounts of events. This is due to a belief the White man has

entertained about the Black man for centuries – that the Black man is a born liar. In fact, the great White architect of the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland once publicly stated that all Black men are born liars. Today he wonders why his Federation went down the drain.

On my shelves I keep as a souvenir Hugh Bryan's *Our Country*, a book of natural history published in 1909. The author says in this book: 'Africa has been called the Dark Continent, because we know so little about it. The ruins of big buildings, which cannot be the work of Black people, are found in Rhodesia. But no one knows who the White men were who built them. Our story is well enough known, but as regards the Blacks, we can only rely on their own tales. These do not go very far, however – they are not very clear, and sometimes we do not know whether they are true . . .'

If the White man's ancestors

believed thus, who can blame their present-day descendants for refusing to listen to a brood of born liars?

Yet some of the Bantu knew all along who built Zimbabwe, and the place in the Brandberg where the so-called 'White Lady' is still to be seen, has been for centuries a place of both Bantu and Bushman pilgrimage. We have known the meanings of most cave paintings since they were painted; they are our history books – our archives. But we have all along been under oath not to disclose their true meanings to foreigners. We have deliberately lied to camouflage the truth (that is, by design, not by nature) and this we have regarded as our one and only triumph over the White man.

So well have the Bantu hidden their knowledge from the White man that those, like my humble self, who try to break this centuries-old taboo of tribal secrecy, meet with open disbelief, and even ridicule,

when they try to help keep the White man's records straight. In another recent exhibition held by my employer's daughter – a display of antique Bantu carvings – several prominent White scientists openly doubted whether I was telling them the truth. One of them said to me that 'much of what you say needs to be taken with a grain of salt'. I did not know this idiomatic expression and only later discovered that it is a gentle way of calling me a 'goddamn liar'. This is, to say the least, rather dampening to the enthusiasm of one who sincerely believes that a better understanding may come from this attitude I am adopting, even though it amounts to turning traitor against my own race.

The White Lady of the Brandberg is but one of numerous rock paintings that tell the enchanting story of Africa's past. It is wrong to study it as an entity in itself; it is part and parcel of the so-called

mysteries of Zimbabwe, Inyanga and many similar places. These paintings and ruins must be studied against a background knowledge of the history and folklore of Africa. But let me deal with the White Lady systematically:

Firstly: It is said that the Abbé Breuil had 'touched up' the face of the White Lady. What I find difficult to believe is why the Abbé Breuil did not sue these critics for defamation. This great scientist has come nearer to the truth than any of his armchair critics. I have been following his progress for many years and have continually checked his findings against our own knowledge of these paintings. He was so dangerously near the truth that certain Bantu Guardians of Tribal History had at one stage considered ways of eliminating him. The face of the White Lady has never been retouched or interfered with in any way, and on closer examination it

will be found that 'her' profile is still exactly similar to those of other figures in the painting. To accuse the Abbé of forgery only serves to show to what depths certain civilised people are prepared to sink in their endeavour to discredit men whose wisdom towers way above their own. I challenge anyone to apply a nuclear age-determining device to the pigments on the face of the White Lady.

Secondly: It is said that the White Lady is not white, but a wealthy Busutu woman, white-daubed and out on a ceremonious hunt. This is utter nonsense. The figure is not only carrying a bow, but other weapons as well, and I would like to know since when have Basuto, or any Bantu women, become hunters of beasts? Since when have Bantu women started copying the Greek goddess Diana? The Busutu, like most Bantu, regard the bow and arrow as the weapon of a coward.

The bow is not a Bantu weapon; its use has been restricted to the Hottentots, Bushmen and the Pygmies. No Bantu warrior, let alone a woman, has ever been seen with a bow and a quiver full of arrows. And, as anyone with even the slightest knowledge of the Bantu should know, never has any Bantu, Bushman, Hottentot or Pygmy woman ever gone out on a hunt. The Brandberg is in South-West Africa and no Basuto has ever been near that land. The Basuto is a very young tribe, founded by King Musheshwe only about a hundred-and-sixty years ago, and the painting is more than two thousand years old.

Thirdly: The latest argument is that the White Lady is a masked dancer, a white-daubed Hottentot specially masked for a hunt. No Bantu, Bushman or Hottentot has ever gone hunting with a mask on his face. A mask is a nuisance; it restricts the hunter's field of vision

and spoils his ability to range stereoscopically. Furthermore, no Bantu, Bushman or Hottentot has ever painted his body for a hunt. Nothing can supersede their natural colouring for effective camouflage; white would be the last colour to use should anyone at any stage have tried such an odd experiment.

If the White scientists had only known a little more about the stories I have unfolded on the preceding pages, there would have been no controversy at all. Something which the White man must come to appreciate sooner or later is that the Bantu attach great importance to the history of their fatherlands and they have a clear perspective on incidents which occurred as far back as ten thousand years ago. This is something Europeans find hard to believe. Their Western culture has turned them into puppets who cannot fathom anything unless they see it happen, or can read about it in

a book. To a White man history is not history unless it is written down, be it on paper, papyrus, clay tablets or stone obelisks. He has forgotten that much of what he can read about today had been passed by word of mouth from father to son for centuries before it was written down. Homer wrote the story of Troy a thousand years after it happened and only thousands of years later archaeologists uncovered the actual scene of the desperate triangle involving Agamemnon, Helen and Paris.

History has always been the foundation of every race's culture; but where a race's religion is based on ancestor worship, its history is no longer merely a foundation – it forms the very structure of their culture. One cannot honour and revere ancestors, seen out of context with the period in which they lived, and the deeds of fame or infamy they committed. When one boasts of

an heroic ancestor, one must picture him within his regiment while fighting this or that battle under chief so-and-so.

Many Kings of Egypt and Greece actually tampered with the histories of their countries, putting down as their deeds things that had either never happened or were the achievements of other people before them. One of the Rameses Kings of Egypt had the nasty habit of stealing the great deeds of earlier Pharaohs and having these recorded as his own, and there is a strong suspicion that certain Emperors of Rome and Greece did the same.

But the Bantu have never allowed anyone, however powerful, to distort history in any way because they strongly believe that by doing so they attempt to deceive the gods with the result that the Spirits of the Tribe would be highly offended. No words can ever describe the depth of this Bantu belief; nothing can ever

show fully the unquestioning fervour and reverence with which the Bantu cling to their tribal religion. The worst fanatics are found in Africa, and should an African dream that his grandfather implores him to go and drown himself, he will go straight and do so the very next morning.



Our religion demands that we preserve for posterity the clearest, most detailed and most truthful account of every major event, whether such event involves persons, families, tribes or the whole race, and whether it is

glorious or infamous. Even after a shameful defeat in battle, men of open minds, strong memories and clear speech are chosen to carry this defeat to future generations in every truthful detail possible. All surviving warriors are called upon to relate exactly what they experienced and witnessed. Every account is carefully screened for exaggeration. Lists of names of the bravest, and also of the cowards, are memorised after double cross-checking. A single story is then extracted from all the less relevant information and this story is entrusted to the chosen Custodian of Tribal History. The story is permanently imprinted on his subconscious mind with a series of the most dreadful oath-taking ceremonies. A Custodian is not likely to forget any of the finer details of the account while he is required, in the process of assimilating the facts, to mate with a baboon or a dog. Such an experience is calculated to leave a

lasting imprint on the subconscious mind.

In this way stories have come down to us through the millennia and an account of the Strange Ones told in Zululand is still exactly the same as the one told in Nigeria: ‘They came out of the sea, and they were carried in the bellies of great sea-going animals with many legs. They wore the bright *tusi* sun metal on their bodies to stop our angry spears of futile bone and brittle granite. Their hair was the colour of dull fire; their skins were like dirty milk into which a little blood has been poured. They carried weapons of ravening iron which laughed to scorn the thick hide of the toothy lion. They wore bands of white around their heads as if to stop their flowing hair to fly off their scalps. Their shields were round with bosses of bronze reflecting the sun, and their battle shouts were loud in the ears of the frightened Bantu.

They killed us with their iron swords. They speared us with their lances and scattered our brains to the seven winds with their axes of iron and bronze . . .

‘And they made us into slaves; they turned us into dogs more tame than chastised women. They built mighty forts in our lands, and forced our women, and the women of the bush-skulking Bushmen, to go down into their mines which they dug with our unwilling assistance, to bring dull iron and bright sun metal to the world above . . .

‘They made tame slaves of us. They made jesters and dancing clowns of the forest-born Bushmen, and they took Hottentots to their alien bosoms . . .

‘But even the sweetest honey can produce an excess of bile, and there is death in every pleasure, for lo! the Strange Ones had most strange and frightening habits. When a man died, his wife was killed with his

sword and buried with him, and into his grave also went half his slaves . . . alive. They did not weep at their funerals; they held a mighty feast. They sang and danced, and did other things of pleasure . . .

‘Soon the race of Ma-Iti was a race of mixed blood. They hunted in ways most strange and repugnant to the Bantu. Men dressed themselves up in the empty skins and heads of slain antelopes to decoy animals to within range of their mighty bows. They used slaves as beaters, and they hunted for the sheer joy and pleasure of killing beasts – for no particular reason at all . . .’

Let us study the White Lady of the Brandberg in detail. The Abbé Breuil was right in one thing at the outset – the White Lady is a White person of Caucasoid or Semitic origin: the long reddish-brown hair, the straight nose and the un-African chin speak louder than words, and only the blind can ignore these facts. The

prehistoric artists of Africa (and of Europe, for that matter) were very observant and accurate in their portrayal of the things they saw.

But the Abbé made a mistake in identifying the figure as a 'lady'. It is not a lady, but a strikingly handsome young White man, one of the five great Emperors who ruled the African Empire of the Ma-Iti for nearly two centuries. Here our historians are not unanimous, but I am positive it is Karesu II, who succeeded Karesu I, the Fire-Beard, the first Emperor. (Karesu is, of course, a Bantu corruption of his real Phoenician name.) The son of Karesu, the Fire-Beard, is known in our legends for his love of hunting. Even today the Batswana sing:

Une atsamae lifatsi
kahofela—
Atsuma tau liditauana;
Atsuma pufudu libe
pukujwe—

*Alisebete, muriri wa
mulle . . .*

He roamed our tribal land
completely—
Hunting big lions and young lions
too;
Hunting the kudu and the jackal
breed—
Great his courage, the one of the
burning hair

I am convinced that the picture is that of Karesu II, because subsequent rulers are all known for their love of relaxation, luxury and homely pleasures. Not a single story has reached us of these later Emperors participating in manly pursuits such as hunting.

The key to the painting is not to be found in the central figure itself. An important figure is the one which the Abbé Breuil called the 'skeleton man', the one behind Karesu II. This figure is wearing a bronze helmet

with a plume, and in his right hand he carries a long barbed stick. This dreaded 'thorn stick' (a flexible cane inlaid with rows of small metal 'teeth'), together with a 'mighty whistling whip of woven hide with the end forked like the tongue of an angry mamba', were classic tools in the hands of slave-drivers. The figure is also carrying two swords with finely tapering points and conspicuous hilts. These are as African as the jet airliner.

The central figure has long red flowing hair decorated with pearls. While the upper part of the face is yellowish, the chin is a stark white. The eyes are also done in white. These observations are very significant indeed. To a Black man, the eyes of a White man seem to radiate a strange 'light', and for this reason few Bantu can bring themselves to face a White man straight in the eyes. The whiteness of the eyes portrays this imaginary

characteristic. The Bantu were also fascinated by the way the straight shiny red hair of the Ma-Iti reflected the light of the sun, and this 'highlight' effect is often shown in bright white in cave paintings. Mostly, however, the hair is depicted in red to characterise the Ma-Iti, and the white 'highlight' is reserved for the beard. The white lines on the face of the 'skeleton man' have been introduced for this effect, too, and this must have given the Abbé the impression of a toothy grinning skeleton head. Ever since, the White man has been described by the Bantu with the less complimentary epithet of 'sunlight beard'. Even the Zulu King Dingana used this epithet (*Ndevu-ze-langa* in Zulu) with contempt when referring to the White Trekkers. There is an old Bantu riddle:

Tell me, tell me, I command you—
Tell me the name of the beast I saw;

Its hair was as long as a wild sable's
tail

Its hair was long as a wild sable's
tail

And the sun shone through its eyes
and beard—

It was shining through its ears and
moustache . . .

The answer to this riddle is 'a White
man!'



Besides the strange bow, the central
figure is also characterised by wrist
guards, studded with metal, to
protect the wrist against the string

of the bow. No Hottentot or Bushman has ever taken such precautions. Another most un-African feature is the strange footwear; although certain Bantu and Hottentots favoured elephant hide sandals, boots are foreign to the African simply because he could never master the art of making them.

Another figure, to the left of Karesu, is wearing sharply detailed, dark brown boots reaching up to the knees, and the soles are white. I have named this figure the 'General'. Our legends still describe the Ma-Iti footwear in clear detail: 'Over their feet they wore things of thick hairless skin, with soles of hard wood that insulted the cruel thorns with their thickness. These things often reached half way up the hairy white legs of the Strange Ones . . .'

On Karesu's upper arms there are thick bands into which are stuck small daggers for throwing, and

even with a casual glance the small hurling axe is quite noticeable. The Bantu were staggered by the accuracy with which the Ma-Iti could hurl a knife or an axe. Our legends tell of how dexterously a Ma-Iti could, when disarmed of his shield and heavier weapons, briskly cross his arms over his chest and grab these daggers from their sheaths around his upper arms, hurling or manipulating both at the same time on two different victims. In his right hand Karesu is holding a trophy-like drinking cup; the idea of a protea or a lotus lily is too ridiculous to warrant comment.

The first of two most remarkable figures above Karesu's head is a man disguised as an antelope. This was a peculiar Ma-Iti habit when out hunting for fun. They would first kill a buck and skin it, leaving the forequarters, or only the neck and head, intact. A decoy man would then wrap himself into the skin and

strut about with the buck's head and shoulders showing above the long grass. The hunters would lie low until the decoy succeeded in leading the other buck within range of their bows. The second figure carries only the head of a buck, and he has in addition a throwing club stuck in his belt.

Another immensely interesting figure is that of a Bantu with hair dyed or daubed red; this peculiarity has persisted until the present day and is still practised as a custom amongst the Swazis. This figure is also wearing a loinskin of leather with metal studs and a harness of broad leather strips, also with studs. With his wrist guards and sandals added, any Bantu historian can recognise him at first glance. He is a favoured royal slave, and entitled to singular privileges. To please his honourable master, such a slave would adopt Ma-Iti customs and daub his hair red to signify his wish

to be as like him as possible.

* * *

In Zimbabwe, on a farm known as Diana's Vow, near the small town of Rusape in the land of the Mashona, there is a famous painting passing under the name of The Dead King. It illustrates a Ma-Iti king being buried in their traditional way, lying on his back with a death mask over his face. No Bantu, Bushmen or Hottentots ever buried their dead thus; only in the sitting position or lying on the side with the knees drawn up under the chin. This is simply based on another strange belief we have that if the body is left in the normal sleeping position, the spirit may also fall asleep and fail to leave the body. The Ma-Iti habit of covering a dead person's face with a mask was also regarded by the Bantu, Bushmen and Hottentots with the utmost revulsion and horror. We believe that the soul leaves the body through the face,

and the basic idea of a mask is to disguise, or to keep the soul within the body, or the character out of sight.

In this painting the king is portrayed as considerably larger than his subjects (a Ma-Iti custom later adopted by all Africans throughout Africa). The dead king is wearing a well-defined shirt of mail and he has obviously been slain in battle. His face is covered with a mask and his long hair is falling loose. In his right hand he is holding something which would appear to be a lump of gold; the Ma-Iti had the habit of burying their dead with some valuable gift with which to bribe their God of Death in the Underworld to lead them to the Land of Everlasting Happiness. Such gifts were usually tied to the right hand of the dead man or woman.

The king's knees are partly drawn up and although he is dead, his penis is erect. The artist obviously loathed

the Ma-Iti, for this is a most insulting portrayal; it is always used to indicate that although the particular loathsome individual is safely out of the way, he has left descendants behind to perpetuate his wickedness.

A small boy is bandaging the arm of the dead king, and again we are confronted with a Ma-Iti custom perpetuated in our legends. The Bantu never bandage wounds before burial; these must remain as open as possible for all the spirits to see and admire. Especially battle wounds are looked upon as battle honours.

Lying next to the king is another massive figure, the Hottentot queen of the dead king, obviously slain to be buried with her lord. This figure is dark brown while the king is yellow ochre and white.

There are two small figures of priests with headdresses, near the king's body, and above there are some slaves about to be buried alive.

Another group of slaves is seen in the left-hand upper corner, below the feet of the king, and this group is clearly wailing and begging for mercy. One has his hands clasped behind his head – a typical Bantu posture of mourning and appeal to the gods for mercy.

Near this group of wretches there are figures of cooks, slave-drivers with whips, and one of the latter is shown as a gross, ugly figure, also with erect penis. A live figure thus represented signifies a rapist.

In the lower right-hand corner, below the vast bodies of the king and his Hottentot queen, there are dozens of fascinating figures of men and dogs like Afghan hounds. A great feast is in progress here and the detail is astounding. There are scores of calabashes containing beer and there are pots of food and skins of oxen left to dry. There are slaves and cooks and Ma-Iti youths, and men walking about with erect

penises. The Ma-Iti are shown with white stomachs and long hair, another insult that shows the depth of the long-dead artist's hatred for the Ma-Iti. The Bantu called the Ma-Iti 'White Bellies', and the Hottentots who fraternised with them they called 'Green Bellies'.

It is very significant that in those figures representing Bantu and Bushmen slaves, the artist did not show the penis at all. In all Bantu paintings of men the penis is prominently indicated (but quiescent) as a compliment to his manliness. But when left out the man is signified as an object of compassion, a weakling calling for pity. The artist's sympathy was obviously with the slaves and there can be little doubt that he was a slave himself. So great was his contempt for the Ma-Iti that he depicted one of them with a penis covered with white spots – a leper-object; perhaps merely wishful

thinking on the part of the artist.

There are also two dancing girls, or 'Alien Virgins of the Wind', as our legends call them. These girls are obviously foreign, not only in their long hairstyles, but more particularly in the fact that they are wearing something which no tribal African ever wore – halters, or 'brassiers', complete with frills. All Africans regard the covering of the breasts as wicked and utterly immoral.

There is in Johannesburg a young man from distant England. He is tall and lean like a lost reed. He has light brown hair, a Roman nose and a long sad face that often seems to be full of care. This young man has a South African-born wife, and she looks strangely like him. They are indeed well matched; they are like brother and sister. She too has a strange, serious and seeking expression on her face and the same smouldering personality . . .

And while most young married couples of the European tribe are content with the kind of life that Johannesburg's concrete jungles has to offer, these young people have devoted their lives to something which may seem to be pathetic, but which is in fact amazing and heroic! This couple who deserve the acclaim of all the peoples of Africa, White even more than Black, and of all the archaeologists of the world, frequently risk their lives in penetrating by foot the wild, untamed and desolate areas of Botswana, and the land of the Ba-Tlokwa in the distant North-West of the Transvaal. No snorting 'jeeps' or 'landrovers' are at the disposal of these young adventurers. Yet they live in a land where scores of millions are spent on preparing for a war that might never come.

White people of South Africa, I, Vusamazulu, a humble Kaffir, am ashamed of you. I am thoroughly

disgusted with your indifference to those things on which your ungrateful lives depend. In all enlightened countries of the world scientists are honoured and revered, even in Nigeria – one of the many African states you like to ridicule. But here you merely throw up your arms in despair when you see your scientists leave for America and Australia.

Your lives depend on a better knowledge of Africa's past. The Belgians never tried to learn more about the Congolese; they were caught unawares even while they were busy with what they thought were good deeds – civilising and developing the Congo. Making money and dabbling in politics are not the most important things in life. Only by unravelling the past can one hope to find the key to the golden portals of the future.

It is not right that a man and a woman like the two I have

mentioned should sweat their lives out in the bush, doing things of national interest and importance while the authorities watch with indifferent eyes. A few rands' worth of equipment would be enough to enable this man to uncover treasures of immeasurable value. A heavy machine-gun, complete with belts and ammunition, costs at least ten times as much. A Saracen costs a king's ransom. A spade for an archaeologist costs next to nothing!

People of South Africa, I call upon you to salute the young man Adrian Boshier. Salute him even while you may be indifferent to the importance of what he is doing for you and the future of your country. This young man and his wife have gone into the lonely bush, armed with only their sleeping bags, and they live in caves like prehistoric Bushmen. They have been forced through sheer hunger to eat lizards, and the 'devil birds', the bats which no Bantu will touch, be

he on the verge of starving. Young Boshier, whom the Ba-Tlokwa have lovingly nicknamed 'Rra-Dinoha' – Father of the Snakes (because of his fearless handling of these reptiles) has already made a long series of significant discoveries. He has already found some of the ruins dating back to the days of the Ma-Iti, and hundreds of cave paintings illustrating much of the stories disclosed for the first time in this book.

One such painting shows a city, or rather the crude town-plan diagram of a huge city with labyrinth-like streets, and a great wall completely encircling it. From the city men on horseback, with plumed helmets are sallying out to repel an attacking army of men on foot. Some of these foot soldiers are shown in black, and they are clearly carrying a long scaling ladder. A mighty battle is in progress, and one of the mounted soldiers is shown in the attitude of

throwing up his arms as his stricken horse falls under him. Adjoining this painting is another like it, showing the city being pulled apart by the victors and its stones being heaped on sleds drawn by oxen and carried away. The treasures of the destroyed city are piled all around it and one can discern chairs, weapons and animals of all kinds. In short, this painting illustrates the central part of Book 2 in this work. But the painting was discovered only after the manuscript of this book had already been written, typed and submitted for publication.*

The Bantu in this wild and relic-strewn region are still very primitive and bitterly suspicious; the fact that Mr Boshier has won their confidence and trust illustrates his remarkable personality. Let higher authorities exploit to the hilt this trust that the Ba-Tlokwa have placed in their White friend 'Rra-Dinoha' for the benefit of science in South Africa.

There is so much that has yet to be unearthed and brought to light. There is so much to be written also for the benefit of all. I pray for that day when the graves of the Ma-Iti shall be opened and another of Africa's vast secrets wrested from the womb of time.

I also pray for that day when a mighty museum shall rear its glittering form against the cuboid skyline of Johannesburg, welcoming thousands of eager-to-learn citizens into its glittering portals like a Queen of Sunset, greeting heroes into the land of Tura-ya-Moya. I long for the day when the Bantu, too, pass through the halls of this museum and proudly whisper while they glance around: 'This . . . this was our yesteryear!'

** This chapter was introduced after the book had been completed.*